

**IT  
WAS NOT  
MY OWN IDEA**

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**ROBINSON PIERCE**







## IT WAS NOT MY OWN IDEA

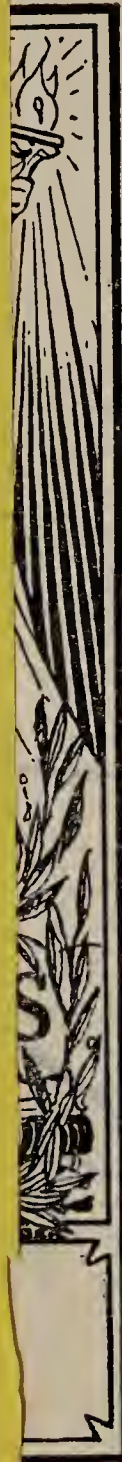
By Robinson Pierce

Introduction by Harvey N. Davis  
President, Stevens Institute of Technology

This is the vivid picture of an energetic, cheerful, quizzical, and thoroughly courageous personality, remaining dauntless even when faced with blindness at the threshold of adult life.

In his college days Mr. Pierce was a star athlete. When blindness came and his intended career of teaching seemed barred he turned to the outdoors to build a new life. How well he succeeded in doing this forms the main theme of the book. It makes an exciting story of a man's adventures in living. There are no heroics, there is no pose, only a very unusual kind of fortitude.

Those who are looking for a "message" in this book will find it in the feeling it gives of an independent spirit who could not even imagine being defeated by fate. This is why it offers so much to others who face a similar reconstruction of life and career.







IT WAS NOT MY OWN IDEA





*It Was  
Not  
My Own Idea*

*by*

ROBINSON PIERCE

*With an Introduction by*

HARVEY N. DAVIS

1944

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TO  
THE GIRL  
WHO CARED ENOUGH  
AND HAD THE COURAGE  
TO WALK BESIDE  
THE PATH I TREAD



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The American Foundation for the Blind is publishing this exemplary documentation of a blind man's dauntless spirit because it is felt that it might well serve as a guide and inspiration for those who like Mr. Pierce must face blindness on the threshold of adult life.



## INTRODUCTION

ANYONE who reads between the lines of this book, will find in it a vivid picture of an energetic, cheerful, quizzical, and thoroughly courageous personality, which is precisely what Rob Pierce has had throughout the more than forty years of our acquaintance.

At Brown University where he graduated in 1902, he was Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi and a varsity quarter-miler, his tall, sinewy figure giving him a stride that it was a joy to watch. Even after he became almost blind he used to enter the hundred-yard dash at each successive Fourth of July Grange picnic, asking only that the race be run on a dirt road instead of on grass so that the faint blur of gravel that he could still see might guide him. He never lost but one of these races, and that was when a young competitor with high-school track training used a conventional sprint start without Rob's noticing it. Rob himself had never before had to use one to win, and this time he realized what had happened just too late. The lad won by a nose with Rob gaining rapidly.

My most intimate contact with him in college was in a small course in advanced astronomy when we worked together as partners for a year in the Ladd

Observatory on each in turn of its various instruments, including the twelve-inch equatorial up in the dome. One gets to know a man well under such circumstances, and I have never had an abler partner in any scientific enterprise, or a more thoroughly unselfish and cooperative one. He did some graduate work in astronomy later and seemed destined for a successful career in that field when his rapidly advancing blindness intervened in what seemed to his friends to be a peculiarly tragic fashion. But I never once heard him complain about the poignant contrast between his expected and his actual careers.

One other thing I always regretted. Rob never knew, except by hearsay, what a particularly attractive-looking girl he married, for he was already blind when he found her teaching school in his rural neighborhood. He knew full well, however, how fine she was in character and temperament, and our hearts went out to him when she recently died, after the manuscript to this book had been completed.

But being sorry for Rob has never been the key in which his friends' relations with him are pitched. We take him for granted as he is, and always enjoy immensely being with him. I hope that you, gentle reader, will similarly enjoy being with him in spirit as you read this book.

HARVEY N. DAVIS, *President,*  
Stevens Institute of Technology.

IT WAS NOT MY OWN IDEA



## CHAPTER I

### JOINING THE FRATERNITY

BEING BLIND was not my own idea. I had not planned for it or wanted it; it simply came. In all these years I have never known what caused it.

When I was very little, the walls of one of the rooms of our house were covered with a paper in which green strongly predominated. I did not like that paper; it seemed to frighten me. My mother would say, "Make believe you are Mr. Gant, and feel your way along." Mr. Gant was an old blind Negro who passed almost daily through the street which ran by the side of our house and I had, of course, watched him with great interest. So I would shut my eyes and feel my way along until I got through that room. I have sometimes wondered whether, through some power of suggestion, this brought on my later blindness.

There were, however, two or three incidents which may have had something to do with it. While I was still quite a small boy, I was hit in the eye by a large



stone during a game of "duck on the rock." This must have given my neck a decided wrench. Then, too, one day when I was nearly full-grown, I was "putting the shot" and because I was only playing at it and did not know any better, I turned my head to see how far the shot was going. With my body whirling in one direction and my head in the other, there was a snap and I dropped to the ground. That may have been bad for the little nerves which come out somewhere down by the neck vertebrae and go up to the eyes. Very likely, however, none of these things played any part in bringing on blindness. From the time I was ten years old I was near-sighted. Of course, I had to wear glasses but plenty of other boys did, too many in fact. I got along perfectly well and did all the things that any boy would do, except playing football. I went along in this way for fifteen years and so far as I recall, the thought of becoming blind never occurred to me. Then it happened; inside of two years I had gradually come to a point where I could not see.

I imagine that most people think that everything looks black to a blind person. I have never asked other blind people how it is with them, but in my own case it is not a matter of blackness. What would be the field of view is gray, not a very dark gray, and with somewhat of a yellowish tinge. I am not surrounded by darkness, neither is there any light—I merely do not see. I do not know that I have made this very



clear. There is nothing of the effect of being shut in by a curtain. To some extent it is like a fog, but not exactly. I get all the effect of seeing, and yet I do not see. It is fortunate that it is not blackness. That, it seems to me, would be depressing. Most of the time, of course, one is entirely unconscious of this background—one is altogether too busy keeping track of what one is doing, but I shall come to that later.

It takes different people anywhere from a few weeks to a year or two to get used to the idea that they are blind. I do not mean getting used to being blind, for that takes time. And I do not mean getting reconciled to being blind, which is a different thing. Ten or fifteen years ago I thought I was reconciled to being blind, but I am not so sure now.

Now, there are two ways of becoming blind. One is to be blind from early infancy, so that you have no memory of seeing things, and the other is to acquire blindness when you are more or less grown up.

I chose the latter course and I am glad that I did so. While it may be true that those who become blind at a very early age take to it more readily (it is a good deal like learning to milk when you are a boy) and acquire a dexterity which those who join the group later cannot hope to gain, still I have *had* a look. I would not exchange that good, long look for any advantage that early blindness could have given me. I do not believe, no matter how intelligent, bright,

clever, or anything else a person may be, that without seeing he can visualize correctly and know what things really look like. Of course, many changes have come into life since I could see. But practically all of them can be described in terms of things which I *have* seen, and I believe that I have a very good idea of what almost everything looks like now—all but people.

We used to hear a blind person spoken of as “running his sensitive fingers” over a person’s features to see what he looked like. I cannot imagine wishing to do this. It does not make any difference to me what people look like. I form my own picture of them and I begin to do so very quickly after I meet them. When I meet a person and take his hand, I know quite a number of things about him at once. Of course his voice and his speech tell me a great deal and I know his height and, in most cases, his build. When I hear him move around, I know more about him. In my mind I see the man with his face and the details of his clothes blurred. It is not so much that they are blurred as that I do not think of them at all. My picture may not be correct in many ways, but it tells me certain things just as truly as the picture formed by a seeing person tells *him*. As a matter of fact, while the sighted person’s picture is undoubtedly very convenient and useful, it may be quite deceiving.

For those who become blind later in life there is a choice of two methods. They may lose their sight

suddenly in an accident, or they may take a reasonable time to accomplish the change. When sight goes suddenly, it must be a shock—a tremendous one. Perhaps you, who can see, can imagine that better than I can now. It always amuses me, when anything happens to the lights, to see how instantly the household is upset. And that little taste of groping is only for a few minutes.

I am not so sure that the sudden shock is so much worse than the gradual diminishing of sight. It is a good deal like having a tooth pulled without having anything to deaden the pain. When it is over, it is over and there is nothing more to dread. There is not even another tooth to be pulled—it can happen but once. After that, as soon as you can pull yourself together, you begin to see what you can do about it.

Luckily for me, the moment of taking stock was a very brief one. I am afraid that I did not feel it as seriously as I should have done. Most of us, I think, take ourselves and things too seriously. At the most, all we can do is just live. I imagine, if we show a good performance under the circumstances given us, we will get a passing grade. And it is not always the one who comes in first in a race who makes the best showing. The going must be considered.

One picture stands out very sharply in my memory. It was after my sight had begun to grow a little poorer. I was in the middle of a long street crossing



when the thought came to me, "Suppose I should become blind?"—"Why me?"—It did not seem fair. I had not done anything more to deserve blindness than thousands of other people who were going on just as they always had done.—"Why me?" We are used to seeing blindness in others. We know that there are a certain number of blind people scattered about. We see them occasionally, all sorts of blind people but, "Why me? — —"

This, of course, could not be the real thing. It was merely a little jolt to give me some unpleasant thoughts for a few minutes. I could still see very well. I could read and get about as well as any one. It was simply that my eyes had begun to fail again and that there was a question, remote of course, as to whether the backsliding could be stopped. As everyone does under these circumstances, I went to doctors, I went to many doctors. I think I have been under the care of every kind of healer except a horse doctor. Perhaps I should have tried that. But I want to say that the doctors were a fine set of men. In most cases, because I had not much money, there was no fee. Many of them asked me to come and see what could be done. They did their best to help and I appreciate it.

Right there is one of the saddest things about becoming blind. As far as my observation goes, when eye trouble approaches blindness, there are very few cures. Oculist's offices used to be full of people going up

and down what I call "the hope ladder." You go up briskly and cheerfully enough and then you crawl slowly down again. I have been up and down that ladder many times and I do not want to repeat the experience any more. That is the procedure that almost all people newly blind, or approaching blindness, go through. They would give anything to keep their sight. They would make any sacrifice rather than submit to blindness without a struggle. So they go through this harrowing process until they have spent their last penny, and in the end they still have to begin life over again, very many of them, without sight and without money.

I was spared the shock of sudden blindness and I am thankful for that. Still, there must come a moment when you realize what is happening to you—you are going to be in the dark, not for an hour, not for a day, not by having your eyes bandaged for a few weeks. You know almost certainly that you will not be able to see, but you do not know much about what goes with it. It may be a long time before you have the full realization of all that it implies. As a blind friend once said to me, "Only the devil and those who endure it can understand."





## CHAPTER II

### LEARNING THE ROPES

THE FIRST TASK which awaits you when you have definitely decided to enter upon the blind life is to learn to do everything without looking, and to learn to do a great many things just a little differently from what you have been used to. I say "decided" because at times it seems as though some people had the notion that you had deliberately chosen to become blind, just, for instance, as you would decide to wear a blue suit. This is not very noticeable usually, and a good deal of it is probably imagination, but it is not all imagination. People do not really think so, but they act as though they thought it had been a matter of choice. You get this feeling at times even among your friends. Although it is probably not nearly so strong, I suppose it is similar to the feeling that the Negro has in his contact with the white race. While they are doubtless unconscious of it, many people convey the impression that they feel themselves to be a little different.

You do not have this feeling with friends whom

you meet constantly, but with those whom you meet only rarely. Extreme instances are, of course, not common because most people are considerate. They do happen occasionally, however.

One morning I was going into the city on a train and someone was to meet me at the station. When the train pulled in, I got out and walked up the platform and out through the gate. This was perfectly easy, because all one has to watch out for is baggage trucks. Outside the gate I walked back and forth a couple of yards from the palings. It was, perhaps, on the third trip that I was assailed by a woman's voice, the tartest, I think, that I have ever heard. She demanded to know what I meant by walking up and down in front of her. I apologized and said that I did not know that I was walking in front of her because I could not see. "Well," she said, "if you are blind you ought not to go where people are." I told her that I hoped she would never be placed in a similar position, but I doubt if she got the full meaning.

Blindness is an inconvenience and it interferes in a good many ways, but it is not the worst that can happen to you, by any means. As I think it over, I believe that there are a great number of people with whom I would not care to exchange physical troubles. The number of blind people is, I imagine, much greater than most people think. If I remember rightly there are something over two hundred thousand blind persons

in this country. But that is rather indefinite, as it is hard to tell just where the line should be drawn between very poor sight and blindness.

Naturally, the first to be learned are the little personal tasks that come every day. Most people do these tasks with only an occasional glance, but that glance is no longer available. It is hard to remember back to my first years of blindness, but it seems to me that one has to be a bit watchful at first even in the matter of lacing shoes. I imagine that no two blind people do these things exactly alike, because in most cases we have to work them out for ourselves.

Parting the hair takes some skill. My own method of doing this is to lay the left hand on my head with the edge where the part is to be and comb the hair away from it. Then I reverse the procedure and continue until there are no irregularities. The queer thing is that, although the side of the hand is curved, the part comes out quite straight—after sufficient practice. Shaving really does not count; a great many men shave without looking in a mirror. As a matter of fact, I cut myself less now when I cannot see than I did before, and I only changed to a safety razor on account of the difficulty of keeping a proper edge.

Early in my development as a blind man, a friend loaned me a little book,\* written by a Frenchman,

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\* Javal, Emile: *On Becoming Blind*. New York, Macmillan.

which dealt with problems confronting a person on becoming blind. I wish I had the book now, because, if the whole of it is as entertaining as the one or two bits which I remember, I think I should find it pleasant reading. One interesting recommendation is that every blind man should buy a house, so that, after once having become familiar with a certain set of surroundings, he will not have to change again as long as he lives. It does seem a happy idea, but how few of us could buy a house.

On second thought, however, I do not think this precaution is at all necessary. I imagine that most blind people do not have much difficulty in getting used to a new locality, although I knew a blind man once who got lost in his city back yard and had to call for help. It all depends upon the kind of life you lead. But if you really want to have a little difficulty in keeping track of your position and direction, try holding by a rope a frisky and somewhat ugly cow that is dancing around you in circles. I led such a cow four miles one rainy winter afternoon and we fought every inch of the first two miles. The last half of the way was along a road which I had never walked on before, but the cow's enthusiasm was over by that time.

The second suggestion which I recall had to do with a precaution against unpleasant experiences at table. The author of this book had had a fork made of



aluminum, which he carried about with him and used wherever he went. The idea was that, as the aluminum was so light, the difference in weight between a proper and improper amount of food on the fork would be more noticeable.

Another passage coming to my mind relates to the handling of certain correspondence. Our French friend said that when he got a letter from a lady, he could tell it by the scented envelope. When he received one of these perfumed notes, he would have his coachman drive him to a poor quarter of the town, where they would pick an intelligent-looking boy. The boy would get into the carriage and read the letter to him. Here, unfortunately, I am at a disadvantage. My hired hand cannot drive anything but a mule and my chauffeur is usually my wife.

There are several activities where, I think, most blind people hate to give in and accept help. Eating is one of them. It seems a great comedown to have someone cut your food and arrange things comfortably. It is not necessarily a fact that *you* cannot do these things, but you have to feel through a fork and with all the skill in the world, there is a possibility, in certain circumstances, that the result may be untidy. After a bit you realize that it is as wise to consider the sensibilities of others as it is to show your grit. There is no question that a lettuce leaf, more or less besmeared with mayonnaise is a vicious thing, and

when you have to stand, holding a cup of coffee and a plate in one hand, and try to eat food that has to be cut with a fork, there is reason to suppose that your conversation may be detached. But then, in time, you devise little ways of doing things so that the performance is fairly creditable.

In telling time most blind people use a hunting case watch with the crystal removed. The old way was to file a little notch at each hour mark in the ring that held the crystal, but this is not necessary. One can tell the time, after some practice, usually within a minute, by laying the thumb of the hand that holds the watch lightly upon the hands. There is also the method of counting the clicks when winding the watch. To do this you wind the watch or clock and let it run for a long time, eight or ten hours. Then you wind it again counting the clicks and noting the interval between the two windings. This gives directly the number of minutes for one click. One cannot tell the time very closely this way, but the method is useful in an emergency.

I have one little trick which sighted people might find worth trying. For many years I have been in the habit of making a guess as to the time before I looked. The result is that even after an interval of a couple of hours, I can usually guess the time within a few minutes.

Another of the everyday needs is the ability to tell



money. Coins, of course, are easy. If there is any uncertainty, it would be between pennies and dimes. In case the milling is all worn off a dime, the coin is also probably worn very thin. If there is still doubt, one must take the trouble to place one coin upon the other, when the difference in diameters will be at once apparent. Paper money, however, is another matter. It is claimed that there have been one or two blind people who could feel the printing of bills. This is entirely beyond me. Also, bills of different denomination are said to be printed on different qualities of paper. My sense of touch does not seem to be developed so keenly along this line, either. Sometimes I get it right and sometimes I do not.

On the whole, I think it safer for me to trust to the honesty of the other person. I do not recall that I have ever been shortchanged. I always have my own money separated to begin with, and when receiving change from strangers, I use a little trick which seems to be a very good safeguard. If there is anyone near I say, "Won't you please tell me what these bills are, so that I can separate them." Anyone close by is almost certain to look and see what is happening. At any rate, it seems to work.

I think I am going to have some difficulty in finding little actions to describe. Perhaps I can make this clear by coming at it from the opposite direction. Occasionally, during the last few years I have tried to

imagine what it would be like to see. I do not mean imagining what it would be like to see a building or a parade. I mean that I try to realize what it would be like to lead a life as a seeing person. I try to think of myself as getting up in the morning and doing everything with the aid of sight. It is hopeless. I never get past fifteen or thirty minutes of the program before I realize that there already have been many little things which I would have done differently with sight. Putting it this way seems to be the same as saying that I cannot comprehend what it would be like to see all the time.

Of course, I can imagine being able to drive an automobile. As a matter of fact, I taught my wife how to drive.

But the full realization of what it means to see has been cramped out of me during all these years. And by the same token, I do not believe that any person who has one or more good eyes can ever know what it really means not to see. With all the sympathy and understanding in the world, they never know, and it is probably just as well.

The great bulk of your endeavor, however, is spent in learning to do a multitude of things in a somewhat different manner from that in which you have been doing them. Take the matter of walking, for instance. A few weeks ago, while reading, I came across a few words about a blind man. The author commented upon

the way in which he marched down a corridor, chin up, with his hand through the arm of a companion. Well, that may do under certain circumstances, where your movements are restricted and supervised, but being left to yourself, the matter changes entirely. Gradually I have acquired a little stoop and I believe the reason is that you cannot save yourself from bumping into things if you are walking along erect, head up and shoulders back. Sooner or later you are bound to meet every conceivable sort of obstacle and have nearly every kind of mishap, that is, if you move about much alone.

Years ago when bicycles were more prevalent, it usually proved to be quite a diversion to step into the middle of a machine which had fallen down on the sidewalk. At one time I ran into a baby carriage which was parked at an angle to a building. The buggy started briskly for the street. Of course, I knew there could be nothing between me and the carriage, so I jumped after it and hooked it with my cane just before it went off the curb. The baby was delighted and gurgled. I parked him again and mother never knew.

One day I was going down a street that I had traveled many times. This time, for the sake of variety, I followed the inside of the walk instead of the outside. Naturally there had been no occasion for anyone to tell me that in front of a certain building a flight of stone steps led down to a basement. The first thing



I knew I was traveling in a trajectory, but I grabbed the railing and the only damage was dirt on my clothes.

On another occasion I was following a man through a building to go to his brooder house. The man knew that I could not see, but as he did not offer any assistance, I assumed that it was plain sailing. I followed his voice. He walked on a plank across the boiler pit and I did not. I caught the plank under my arm and avoided the mess of soft coal, but it was a surprise to realize my position.

As far as I can remember, I always managed to catch something, except when I fell down the elevator well. Then there was nothing to catch. In trying to reach something I turned on my back in much the same way, I suppose, that a cat turns in the air. Luckily, it was only two stories and there was a plank staging about five feet from the bottom, which was used when it was necessary to do something to the bottom of the car. I knocked this flooring all to pieces and was hunting for the exit when they came to let me out. Of course, I was laid up a while afterwards, but, strange to say, at the time it did not hurt at all. This is a great comfort, because I know now that if I ever fall from a building, while the results may be bad, it will not be painful at the time.

These things happened a long time ago when blindness was still new to me. They bring out, I hope, to some extent the fact that you must be always and

forever on your guard. As time goes on being careful comes to be second nature. Every little motion, even moving the hand, has to be considered, briefly of course, with a view to the consequences. Perhaps you will knock something over. Perhaps you will push something off a table. If you are not careful, you may get splinters in your hands or a gash on your leg. While this mental survey of the surroundings is after a time almost instantaneous, nevertheless, it must not be omitted. Each time you are careless you are apt to get a reminder, and often a painful one.

One of the early lessons may be given by a wooden-back chair. If you stoop to pick something from the floor so that your head is in full motion when it gets to the level of the top edge of the chair back, and if the bridge of your nose comes sharply upon this edge, you will get a surprise. If you are in the habit of making quick motions, you will get even more of a surprise. It is not, of course, good form for a blind man to go about waving his arms in front of him, but after a while you come to believe that it is wise to make one slight motion of the hand and find out if the coast is clear.

One mishap, which one would never dream of guarding against, may be caused by a clothesline. One day I was walking fast and met a clothesline at a slight angle. The line was exactly at the height of my eye and, naturally, a blind person's eye does not close

automatically when something comes very near it. You would be surprised to find out how long it takes to get an eye away from a clothesline under these circumstances. I slid my open eye along that line for five or six feet. I am sure that, no matter how profane a person may be under ordinary circumstances, he will not swear when he meets a manila line in this way. He cannot.

I can have a tooth pulled without moving the slightest little muscle. I tried it a few months ago to see if I still had any grit. It is absolutely nothing compared to the clothesline incident. Much the same effect may be obtained by getting a slash across the eyeball with the tassel of a cow's tail on a very cold morning.

If you move about freely, you are bound to get these knocks, hundreds of them, thousands of them. Sometimes you get one in a day, sometimes two, sometimes fifteen. It is part of the price which you pay for the distinction of being blind. Gradually I have accumulated dents on my skeleton. I have places on my head and my shins to fit any sort of projection which may be produced. It is something after the order of French scrolls. As a result of this incessant banging, there have been periods of months during which I have not had a whole skin on my legs. Before one set of gashes could heal, the next would come. Perhaps the worst was when someone left a disk harrow in the lane and I was hurrying—.



What I said about the distinction of being blind arouses a great deal of feeling in me. It seems that one's blindness makes a far greater impression upon people than any other characteristic. I often have it brought home to me in this way. *Pierce*, pronounced *Purse*, apparently is very hard to understand over the telephone. Unless I know the person quite well, I usually have difficulty in making myself known. I try every means I can think of to identify myself. Finally, in desperation, I say, "The blind man." Immediately there comes a cheery, "Oh, yes." It is the most disgusting thing I know of. It takes a tremendous amount of effort to overshadow blindness, and it is almost impossible to have it forgotten.

As times goes on, it is borne in upon you that you cannot depend wholly upon any one as a guide, with a few exceptions. This, of course, is what you would expect. People in general are not drilled in the matter of keeping this watchfulness always in mind, no matter what else they may be talking or thinking of. There will be a few persons who can be trusted always to remember, but, with the majority, while you must not let them know it, you must be prepared for anything. Sometimes it will be a bang on the shoulder from a post or the corner of a building. If you carry your watch in the little trousers pocket, this brings it, in the case of a person of my build, directly in front of a hard hip bone. After one or two cases of break-

age, you will realize that it is advisable to have your arm or hand, unobtrusively, in such a position that you get a warning in time to save the watch.

It is amazing with what regularity a person will direct you by one mudguard and at the same time allow you to brush against the car that is parked next to it. No one, of course, is going to run you into an obstacle when things are fairly clear, but when there is some congestion the novice guide is apt to do the wrong thing. One time, years ago, I was walking with a young man through the woods and we had to jump a brook. He was so interested in seeing that I did not land in the water that he forgot to tell me that I was jumping directly at a tree about eighteen inches from the further bank. The first I knew of it was when my hat brim touched the tree.

That brings in another thought. You must acquire the ability to stop short. All of your motions must be made so you can stop short. If you are told to jump five feet to clear a brook, you must be sure that you jump five feet, but not much more, and arrive pretty well balanced.

A little incident occurred a few months ago which amused me very much. I had an unexpected errand to do one night and our car was not here. I went down to the village and induced a young man to take me a couple of miles back into the country in his truck. When we reached there I left Willie in the truck and

went into the house. On coming out, partly as a precaution and partly to locate him, I said, "Willie, don't let me get against that mudguard."

As I headed for the car, the man whom I had been to see said, "He knows how to get around, sure enough, don't he, Willie."

"Yes," said Willie, while I removed the mud from his truck with my trousers, "he does first rate for a blind man."

This sort of statement, in one form or another, comes your way from time to time. Usually we can smile at it and yet condescending commendation from some quarters becomes at times a little wearisome.

Irrespective of what other people may think, your general education consists in learning to do without sight all that you will have to do and as much as possible all that you would like to do. You must learn to do things by feeling and to take account of sounds and, to some extent, smells. Sounds are very important. I am not sure but that we use sounds fully as much as we use feeling. At any rate, I know that my activities would change greatly if I couldn't hear.

It is difficult to think of these little "blind" tricks for two reasons. The first is that they are such little things, mere motions, ways of making a motion, and they are innumerable. And you have acquired a certain way of making every movement. The second reason is that as years go by, you become almost wholly un-



conscious of them. You have to a great extent lost the other person's viewpoint. I remember, when I first became blind, having a friend tell me of meeting a certain blind woman in a shop. Someone placed a little trinket in her hand. She responded instantly, "Oh, yes, I have one."

At that time, when I was just beginning to use the other senses left to me, that instant recognition seemed marvelous. And now it is a matter of course. This shop incident perhaps gives some idea of what I mean. The "blind" life has become the natural life. I am, for the most part, unconscious of the way I do things and even my family, I think, do not realize many of the precautions I take. There are some, however, in which they have to participate. Take, for instance, the matter of passing a cup of coffee. If you say, "Here is your coffee", and hold out the cup, there will probably be an accident, no matter how carefully the blind person moves. What you must do is to say, "Here is your coffee," and wait until his hand is extended. It is very simple when you have thought of it. The point is that there are thousands of these little tricks.

When my sight was about gone, I think I rather made a game of it, learning the new life. I had no choice about entering the game, but as long as I *had* to play it, I might as well learn *how* to play it. And at least it was interesting. I had plenty of time,—more time than anything else. Aside from those fortunate

ones, if they are the fortunate ones, whose activities, after the coming of blindness, have been wisely directed at this early stage, most of us have ample time. The old life has stopped and the new one begins slowly.

Most of my time was spent in tinkering around, making chicken coops, putting up fences and so on. I learned to do rough carpentry without eyes. I had to split the firewood. My method was to hold the stick on the block with one hand and let go just before the axe hit it, so that it did not have time to tip. Someone took a picture of this proceeding, with the axe half way down and it certainly looked as though I were going to lose part of a hand.

The picture greatly affected an old lady who came to see us. She said to my mother, "Don't, don't ever let him do that again." It wasn't as bad as it looked. If we could have the same control in all things, many operations would be simpler.

Doubtless many of the odd little experiences which I underwent would never happen to one who deported himself quietly as a blind man should. I believed, however, that the thing to do was to carry on as nearly as possible in the same way as before—when I could see. I know that many blind men feel that way and I believe we have much more zest for life in spite of the occasional knocks. The family, however, has not always looked at it in that way. On this account it is

often wiser to try experiments long after dark, so that others may not be annoyed. When I had a farm in Massachusetts there were two houses on opposite sides of the road. The chimney on the front part of the house across the street from where we lived had not been used for several years and had been neatly covered with tin to keep out the weather. One night, when all were well asleep, I decided to go up and take off the tin, as I wanted to use the chimney before long. So I stuck a hammer and a pair of pliers in my back pocket, and by wise forethought, gathered a pocketful of pebbles as I crossed the road. I went through the scuttle onto the roof and hitched along the ridgepole.

It was a two-story house. When I thought I had gone far enough, I began rolling pebbles down the roof to locate the chimney. When I had found it, I rolled a series of pebbles a few inches apart to find out where the middle of it was, so that I might have a fair start. I let myself down, clinging to the ridgepole, but I could not touch it with my feet. I had no idea the chimney was so far from the middle of the house. Still, I knew I must be over it, so I let go and slid.

I found the chimney all right, but it was so high that I could barely reach the top when standing on tiptoe. The tin was well fastened, both nailed and wired. It was a job getting the tin off, but finally over it went, clang, bang down the roof and then to the ground.



I threw the hammer after it and started to return, but the roof was so steep that I couldn't crawl up. Shingles last longer on a steep roof and that house was built by a Scotchman. I crouched down against the chimney and sprang like a cat. As I swung my leg over the ridgepole, the family were all out in front of the house in which we lived, anxious to know what the infernal racket was and demanding to know the meaning of this last fool stunt. I calmed them from the ridgepole.



### CHAPTER III

## BACK TO THE LAND

WHEN MY SIGHT WENT all I knew, literally, about blind people was that they read with their fingers and felt their way about with a cane. I had never known a blind person and I knew of no one who was familiar with their ways of life. I thought I could take care of a few hens and the pleasantest thing I could think of was to live in the country. There it would be quiet and I could peg around by myself and find out what I could do.

Someone suggested that I go to the Commission for the Blind and see what they would say. I went and told them my idea of living in the country. They agreed heartily that it was a grand scheme, and encouraged me in it. Not one word was said to the effect that many people, blinded in adult life and having been established in a profession, kept on with their work and led much the same life as before. I had been teaching in a technical school when my sight began to go. If I had had a little good advice at that time, I imagine

the last thirty years would have been different. I followed the only plan that seemed possible to me at the moment. Then, after I got into the country, I foolishly wanted to see it through.

The Commission gave me a sheet containing the braille alphabet and I set out to find a little farm. It was not much of a farm. I took it because it was near the home of a friend. It had several hen houses, it was for rent, and I did not need a place for general farming. This one was pleasant and seemed to fill my requirements.

There must be rockier farms than that one. You can always find things worse than what you have and people worse off than you are. That farm was divided into little two or three acre fields by stone walls and there were enough rocks left to make several office buildings.

Still, it was pretty. The house was on the slope of a hollow and at a slight bend in the road. There were big trees in the triangular dooryard, a huge lilac bush by the well, and all the fittings of an old New England farm. At the back of the house a wide lane ran up to the field at the west. There were one or two sheds and trees on either side. At the right of the lane just before you came to the field was the big old-fashioned barn. Beyond the field stretched thick pine woods. One winter morning I came into the lane a couple of hours before sunrise. The ground was white with snow.

The moon, just past the full, was low above the black pine trees. It was a beautiful picture in black and white. It is the last picture that I remember.

On that farm I had my first lessons in working without light. I cared for my hens and with the help of a friend built several poultry houses. Later I built many small buildings alone. I had utility hens and fancy stock. As a matter of fact, the fancy birds proved to be just as good for practical purposes as the others. For the highly bred stock I bought aluminum leg bands and brailled the bird's number on them. In this way I could tell all the best birds myself. In raising these birds I had the help of the breeder from whom I bought the original stock. He matched up the breeding pens and I had the benefit of his advertising and reputation. He sold the birds and we split fifty-fifty. We got very good prices, for some birds that were raised on my rocky farm won first places at big shows.

In the winter I bought an incubator and brooder. We built a second brooder which worked as well as the one we purchased. With the incubator I had help to the extent of having someone watch the lamp and read the thermometer. I also had to have someone test the eggs for fertility. The rest I did myself. The brooders in those days were heated by lamps. Someone had to tend those lamps and, for the first few days each season, read the thermometer. After that I got used to it and could regulate the temperature well



enough by putting my hand under the hover. I always had better success with raising chickens in brooders than with hens.

In the spring I bought my first cow. She was not a high producer but we revelled in cream. We had a kitchen garden and made what hay there was on the place, but that was the extent of our farming operations.

During this first year I gained quite a bit of newspaper notoriety. One account amused me very much. After taking a number of pictures, the newspaper artist who came to see me said he wanted to get something which would show me "in the hen business". He wanted to get me coming out of a hen house with a basket of eggs. I was not too keen about too much realism, but those people are apt to have their way. If you do not do what they wish, they will do something worse. So I stuffed a peck basket full of paper and scattered a few eggs over the top. When the article appeared, it showed a full length picture of me, the height of the sheet. Under it in large letters was, "A Bushel of Eggs a Day—Says the Professor." I had only about sixty hens, but surely a newspaper knows what it wants.

One of the troubles I had to contend with was hen thieves. A hen thief is a mean kind of a thief and one who steals a blind man's hens seems especially mean. We had a dog, a beautiful collie, but of such a friendly



disposition that no one was in fear of it. The dog made a great noise at the slightest disturbance in the night. That was the total good done. Then I began to inquire for ugly dogs. I never had to buy another dog. Anyone who had a dog so vicious that it was not safe to have around, sent it to me. One or two were plain wild beasts. These did no more good than the beautiful collie. I had to keep them chained or they would have eaten the leg of some innocent wayfarer. That was perhaps as well, because if I could have left the dogs at liberty, they would have been poisoned or shot and the stealing would have gone on as before.

But I had plenty of warning from the dogs. When they barked, I would jump out of bed, and ramble about the place with a gun. Usually, when I appeared the barking stopped. This was a little puzzling. Either the marauder was gone, or the dogs had recognized him as someone they knew, or he was still near by, hiding. It surely gave one a queer feeling to walk around, knowing that all a man had to do was to stand still and crack you over the head if you got too near.

Finally the stealing seemed to settle down to a system. Each night as soon as it was dark, I went out and counted the birds on the roosts. Each night there proved to be one or two hens less than there had been the night before. Two of the neighbors and a newcomer named Murray and I organized ourselves into a little band to lay for the thief. Murray was a great tall

Nova Scotian who lived in a shack down the road and worked by the day for all of us. We could not stay up all night and work all day, so we went on duty one night and stayed until twelve and the next night went on at midnight and watched until morning. It seemed best to have all four on at once, as we suspected a bunch of three men who lived a couple of miles off. Nothing happened in the way of detection. It seemed obvious that the villains were watching us, too, and knew when we were on guard, as the losses of hens continued. We had a detective for a few nights, all to no purpose.

Finally one night when there was no one on duty, old Rick set up a furious barking which did not sound like practice. I hopped out of bed, grabbed the thirty-two gun, and went out to a central point where I might hear noises at any of the houses. I must have been a conspicuous object, clad in white, in the moonlight. Rick quieted down. I listened—not a sound. The sheriff had told me that I must not shoot a man because he was roaming about the place in the night, unless he was in, going into, or coming out of a building. I must hail him first, but, he added, “I wouldn’t wait very long after I called.” I listened until it hurt. It was dead quiet. At last under an apple tree about seventy feet away there was the faintest crack. I called and fired so quickly that no human being could have started to open his mouth. I missed him. The

ground sloped down and I probably shot a little too high. The bullet whistled across the lowland. Still I must have come pretty close, for a blind man stands a pretty good chance when it comes to shooting at sounds in the dark.

At any rate, the bullet was effective. Most farmers go out with a shotgun. If the thief is hit he goes to a doctor in the next town, the shots are picked out and no questions asked. But good sized bullets are different. It ceases to be interesting if the whistling is too near and all there is to be gained is a hen.

After that, as far as I know, I never had another hen stolen while I lived in the neighborhood. A few months later when Murray moved off, we found over a wall by the edge of the woods enough feathers to make a bed. At least it was quite a pile, for I had lost something over fifty hens. However, he fooled the men with eyes as well as me.

After two years it was evident that more room was necessary. I was getting married and wanted to build a real home. There seemed to be no virtue in building more poultry houses on someone else's land. With the help of a friend we acquired a small farm near by. It had on it another of those little old houses, built before the Revolution. Instead of being covered with boards, the walls were of oak plank and the sills were fourteen inches square. Some of the partitions were panelled with wide boards, worked out by hand. The nails and



latches were hand-wrought. The chimney always interested me. The base of it was so large that it occupied nearly all of the cellar, leaving merely a trench about ten feet wide around it. The front of the house consisted of two enormous rooms with a hall about three by six feet between them. In the middle of the back was a good-sized kitchen and the rest of the space was chopped up into little cubby holes of rooms.

The kitchen had a big fireplace, kettle and crane in a separate compartment, and a brick oven. From various places half a dozen flues rambled upward to unite in the one chimney. Roof and walls were of gray shingles. We painted the trimmings white and the effect was good. The front and half the roof were covered with climbing roses. For seven days in June they made the place beautiful.

At this time it happened that the large and original duck farm of this country was being dismantled and sold out. It was only four miles away. We bought a quarter of a mile of duck house, cut it into freight car lengths, and moved it to the new place. When it was all joined together and arranged for hens, we had thirty-nine pens. It was very easy to lose track of which pen I was in, so I brailled the numbers of the pens on the door posts with upholstery tacks.

When the inside of the dwelling had been thoroughly overhauled, we transplanted the cow and the hens. The next day we were to follow with the furniture.

It did not seem wise to leave all that poultry alone, so I decided to sleep there myself. As the new paint was not so hard as it might have been, I took something to lie on and camped out in the open attic. My plan was to attend to the live stock about five in the morning, go home and have an early breakfast, and begin the moving. I put my watch where I couldn't roll on it and lay down with my head to the chimney.

When I woke up, the moon was shining straight in the window. At that time I could still see a bright light. I fed and watered all the hens and then turned to the cow. I thought she liked her new clean quarters, for she did not appear anxious to get up. After some gentle prodding, however, she arose and ate her breakfast while I milked her. Then I stood about waiting for signs to show that folks were stirring in the neighborhood. There were no morning sounds, so after a bit I went up and examined the watch. It was nearly one o'clock. Then I realized that in figuring on the direction of the moon I had forgotten to allow for two bends in the road. While they were on the same road, there was about seventy degrees difference in the way the two houses faced. The hens were, of course, oblivious of the proceedings, but I have often wondered what the cow thought.

On the new farm I had a chance to try my hand at many things. As a matter of fact, I did almost everything, myself, except work which required the use of



a horse. In those early years we had one of the neighbors come and do the horse work. I set out plants and picked vegetables, peas, beans, and even haricots verts. In the fall I dug my supply of potatoes for the year, pulled the root vegetables and stored them in the cellar.

I think one of my hardest jobs was picking cherries. Everything went very well until I came to the last scattered ones. All of it required a good deal of groping, but for the last cherries I had to have someone stand on the ground and tell me where they were. It was difficult for them to tell just how far beyond my hand a cherry was and it was slow and tedious work.

I was always making chicken coops, gates, runs, and so on. Perhaps the meanest job for a blind man is putting up barbed wire; I have put up barbed wire fences alone, and, which is worse, taken them down.

Occasionally I got more than I bargained for. At one time I built a summer house with a cement floor. I laid the cement myself and the result was very creditable. But in spite of my somewhat elaborate arrangements for keeping track of the level by various gadgets, I found, as usual, that I could do much better by feeling. As a consequence, I burned the ends of all my fingers pretty thoroughly on the cement and for several days milking was a painful pastime.

Many things which people are apt to regard as somewhat remarkable may not be so difficult as others

which appear quite simple. Oftentimes I got credit for powers which I did not possess. Under the circumstances, I think it is permissible to hold on to all the good reputation you can get, so I accepted credit for any little occurrence without comment.

I presume there are still some dirt roads left in country districts in New England. In those days, when the frost was all out of the ground in the spring, there were deep ruts in the road due to the heavy carting when the ground was soft. As the ground became firm, the town fathers sent the road scraper around to level these ruts and crown the road. One day the scraper stopped in front of my house and I was chatting with the driver. He had a fine four-horse team and I spoke of them.

"Rob," said he, "How much does that horse weigh?"

I knew the animal was huge. Laying my hand on his shoulder, I said at random, "Seventeen hundred."

"By Godfrey," Bill came back, "That's just what he does weigh. I couldn't judge a horse better myself." And he always owned twenty or thirty horses. I also had some reputation as a judge of a good cow, but there was some foundation for that.

Another of these haphazard incidents is always amusing to recall. A mile or two from our house lived a retired seaman. He was a most profane man, either with or without provocation. On the occasion of a casual visit, we repaired, as is usually the custom among

farmers, to the pig pen to discuss the progress of the winter's meat supply. During the talk, I happened to say, "Now, that big hog . . . .", at the same time giving my hand a flip and pointing into the pen.

I had no intention of pointing at anything in particular, but it turned out that I pointed directly at the big hog. It happened, too, that the hog had grunted just as I spoke. My visitor frequently related the amazing happening to his friends. "By — — — —," he would conclude, "You know that blind man can tell every — — one of those hogs by his grunt."

Of course, we increased the number of hens when we had all this housing space, but we never had all the room occupied. If I remember rightly, thirteen hundred is the greatest number of birds I ever had. The care of these, along with the other routine work, made a fairly busy day.

For some time we raised the fancy birds. It appeared, however, that there were enough people nearby who believed that there was not much profit in a hen after her first year so that we could keep up our quota by buying these yearling hens. We kept them one year and then sold them. That saved all the work of raising chickens and it proved very satisfactory. At this time the day-old chick business was just beginning. We sold eggs to a hatchery in the spring each year, which nearly doubled the price of eggs during the season of greatest production.



Gradually, too, we added to the cows. When we bought the second cow, we had more milk than we needed, so we sold a part of a can each day. As the supply went down, we added a third cow, and so on, until we were keeping fourteen. I evolved my own system of buying cows and it proved to be a good one. After watching various trading operations, I decided that for most people to match their judgment and skill against those of a cow dealer was very unwise. So I went to the best cow trader in the neighborhood and said, "Frank, I want to make an arrangement with you. Now you know just the kind of a cow I want."

"Yes, Robbie," said the big man, "I know what you want. You want a cowey cow."

"Well," said I, "Here's what I want to do. When I need a cow, if you haven't the kind of a cow I like at the moment, say so and I'll wait a few days. If you have, say how much you actually want for her. If I can stand it, I'll take her and if I can't, I'll say so. I'll never ask you to come down on the price and don't you ever give me a cow that isn't right."

It worked. Since then I bought most of my cows over the telephone and did not see them until they were delivered. I don't think I paid more for real cow value than anyone else. I had as good a string of cows as anybody in the neighborhood, and better than most.

In the meantime we had begun keeping horses. At first we got horses for their keep from my friend

Frank—one derelict after another. When I had had one a few weeks, he would trade it off and send me another wreck. Finally I asked him if he did not have something that was really some good. So he sent over a good horse. After we were well used to it and could not have stood going back to the old ramshackle specimens, he said persuasively, "Robbie, buy that horse." We bought him and he served us well as long as we were on the farm.

The next step was a big work team. It began to be expensive hiring all the horse work done, so we decided to shift over to the other camp, doing our own work and working for others when we did not need the horses. We kept a teamster, so that the big team worked all day every day. In the winter we hauled box logs to the mill. Occasionally I had to help load box logs. It was not real logging, however, as the logs were only six feet long. For the heavy ones we used a horse and rolled them up on skids. The lighter logs formed the top of the load. One man stood on the load with a huge pair of ice tongs. The other stayed on the ground. I had to be that one, of course. The man on the ground up-ended the log so that one end rested against the load. The upper man grabbed the end of the log with the tongs, while the lower man got his hands under the bottom. Then with a heave, a lift and a shove, the log went up into place.

It was good exercise. The only difficulty was that



sometimes the tongs would slip. Then the stock would twist suddenly and as the bark was close to one's face, there was a good chance of getting side-swiped. There was no warning for one who could not see, but I never got more than a light scraping. When it was a bad haul, out of the woods, we took three horses. After we got where two horses could handle it, I climbed onto old Jerry and he took me home.

One season we had so many more vegetables than we could use that my wife and I decided to try a little "direct to the consumer" business. This was the only method available, as there were not usually wholesale quantities of any one thing. We had, however, a very varied garden. This venture proved a great success. I suppose we were a picturesque pair. At any rate the folks in town seemed to get some sort of kick out of us. After a few weeks the old Democrat wagon would no longer hold the load and us. We borrowed an express wagon for a few weeks. When the sweet corn came, the express wagon was inadequate. Then we found a large covered wagon which served the purpose very well.

One morning I happened to get out before the man who was supposed to harness the horse so I set about doing it myself. The three stalls were on one side of the stable and on the opposite wall, directly behind them, the harnesses were hung. I took down the collar, walked across the barn and put it on the horse. Then

I went after the saddle and buckled that in place. Next I got the bridle. After that was in place, I slid my hand down the horse's neck, and to my surprise, the collar was gone.

The young men who worked for us were keen on practical jokes, but they had never tried them on me. Still, it was a beautiful chance, and it was possible that one of them had slipped in and removed the collar. Then the light dawned for me. I went around into the next stall. Sure enough, there was the collar on Tom. I had walked back and forth without paying much attention to what I was doing and it had been easy to get into the wrong stall. In the cold gray dawn it struck me in a funny spot.

Those big horses were very lively for their size. Two or three times they ran with us when we happened to be under a railroad bridge as a train passed over. It was impossible to stop them. Even the big teamster could do nothing but steer them when they ran. A small woman had no chance whatever, but we always had the luck to come through without mishap.

One night we had been delayed and it was very late when we drove home. My wife and I were both asleep. As we came to the top of a hill, Sam, who liked to trot on a down grade, started off briskly. We awoke with a start and all I heard was, "I've dropped the reins!" Without stopping to think that the chances were just as good sitting still, I climbed down and got one foot

on each shaft. Then I let go of the wagon and bent forward, putting one hand on the horse's back. The moment I touched him he broke into a gallop. I couldn't get back then, so I climbed out onto his back, where I could use the side check for reins. That's the way we went down the hill. The wagon was rocking, my wife was calling out, "Right—Left," and I was having a wild ride while I guided the horse. Then came the up grade and Sam was willing to stop. I insisted, however, that we continue as before and we galloped to the top. That ended running downhill for Sam.

I have tried to give some idea of the variety of things which one can manage to do without sight. Some require grit and some take patience. For others, a great deal of ingenuity in devising working methods is necessary. I have pitched hay onto the load and I have built the load. And then, when we got to the barn I have been told to jump into the mow and clear a beam six feet down and five feet away. For me that takes grit. The rounding edge of a springy load of hay does not offer a good footing to jump from. You don't know whether you are going to clear the beam or not.

Another thing that takes grit, if you allow yourself to think about it, is to feel about in the corners of a shed where there may be a rattlesnake. When I think of it, I have the shivers, but, strange to say, I can stop



thinking about it. If one is wakeful in the night, it is almost impossible to stop thinking, and, yet, in the matter of snakes, in a few seconds I can get the thing out of my mind and go on with what I have to do. I have put my hand into a grain barrel and grabbed a live rat. There is quite a thrill to that. I find that I do not have to spend so much time hunting for thrills as some people.

We had a gas engine for pumping water into a pneumatic tank. I have taken that engine to pieces and put it together again many times. In fact, I was the only one who could persuade it to go when it had an obstinate streak. I have given medicine to cows that were so ugly that the hired man would not try it. They were my cows, however, so I gave the medicine. One cow nearly broke my neck. I got the medicine into her all right, but I had to let go sometime. When I did, she shot me into the air and my head just grazed a beam right above us.

For a few days, when we were left without help, I have taken care of fourteen cows, some hundreds of hens, fifty hogs, and three horses, besides doing the odd chores. It made a long day and I should not care to do it regularly.

And then, when the war came in 1917, good help grew scarce. The three young fellows who worked for us went into the army. Those who succeeded them were poor and changes were frequent. We kept on



for a year or so, but it began to look hopeless. In an agency one day I was interviewing a big Irishman. He asked all sorts of questions. I cut him down to milking three cows and reduced all other work until there was not more than a quarter of a job left. Finally he asked, "And where do I eat?"

"With the foreman in the house across the road," I replied.

"I'll eat with no foreman," and away he stalked. That was about the end. We swore off on farming forever.

And here we are back on the farm again. This time it is a cracker farm. It came about in this way. One summer we heard some talk about tung nuts. We were interested at once and asked a multitude of questions about tung nuts and tung oil. They proved to be very interesting indeed. I find that not many people know about them.

The oil for which the trees are grown has qualities which put it much in demand. It is the ingredient which gives their particular properties to waterproof paints and varnishes. There are other uses, where a gummy waterproof substance is needed, as in the manufacture of insulation and linoleum, and there will be still more when the supply of the oil is large enough. The oil, known in commerce as China wood oil, has been imported for a long time. The Chinese product is, however, full of impurities and the supply is limited.

There have been a few tung trees in Florida for a long time; there are some which are forty or fifty years old, but they were grown merely as shade and ornamental trees and were considered curiosities. Some time ago it became apparent that, since the trees did very well in this climate, there were possibilities in growing them commercially. Since then there have been many experiments and much development and there are now perhaps ten thousand acres set out to tung trees in this immediate section.

That is why we are back in the country and on a cracker farm. And then, too, we like it, all except the red bugs and the ants and the sticktights and the coach-whips and the alligators.

Yes, we have alligators as neighbors. In a little pond in the opposite corner of this forty in which the house is located there are sometimes six or eight alligators. I say sometimes, because alligators travel from one body of water to another in the night. The largest we have seen in our pond was ten feet long. We got him.

Personally, I do not like alligators. Before we knew, we used to swim in that pond. As anyone will tell you, there is almost no danger from alligators when you are swimming, hardly one chance in a thousand. However, I seem to be of a peculiar turn of mind. I like to know which chance it is, and as there is no way of finding out, I let the 'gator have the pond to himself.

I don't like alligators much better on land. When

one of them takes a notion to speed up, he can outrun a horse and he can slide over a four-foot wire fence without the slightest trouble. But, as we are told, an alligator, while he has a tremendous power to close his jaws, has almost no strength to open them. You can hold his jaws shut with your little fingers. All you have to do is to grab his jaws and clap them shut before he gets you and tie them together with a thin cord. Then he is as safe as can be. It is so easy it almost sounds foolish.

We found a little house built in the cracker fashion in the corner of the front forty. The house was typical of those to be found on these Florida farms. There were two fairly large front rooms, with two smaller ones—"shedded" onto the back. Across the front was a shelf of a porch. I boxed in and screened this porch myself, doing most of the work in the middle of the night, as I was in town every day at the time, tutoring. The house had been fixed up inside and was very livable, much different from the ordinary farm house here. Many cracker houses are unceiled. When they are ceiled it is usually not with plaster. In most of these houses there is a bed in every room except the kitchen. Even the "fire-room", which is the front room at the end of the house where the chimney and fireplace are located, is ordinarily furnished with a bed, one or two chairs, sometimes a trunk or sewing machine, and rarely a table. We feel quite apart in



having a living room without a double bedstead in it.

Of course the house was too small. In the course of time, the family had been added to by four children, three boys and one girl. We needed more space. A year or two after we came, we added enough to the house that was there to double its size. We built this addition as a separate unit, which is a common practice here. The houses often consist of two or three of these "islands" and the channels between are porches or "breezeways". In summer, with all doors and windows wide open, it is fine and airy. And in winter, too, for that matter, there is no lack of airiness in these breezeways. Only, then, we scuttle from one warm spot to another.

Even where there is nothing more pretentious, the kitchen is usually built behind the main house and connected by a bridge or wide platform. In one respect we showed great foresight. We made the dining room at the end of the addition so that it has windows on three sides. If there is any air stirring at all, we get it. For myself, however, I think that the discomfort in winter more than overbalances the relaxed sprawl effect of summer. I believe that just as good results can be obtained in other ways. At any rate, if I ever build a new house down here, it will not be on the archipelago plan.

Then we had trouble with the water. When we came, there was an open well behind the house. That



had no appeal at all. In summer, during the heavy rains, sometimes the water stood within two inches of the level of the ground. We tried pipe wells. The first was fairly good until someone wrenched the pipe and started the sand. That ruined that well. We drove another and struggled with it for a year and a half. It did not make a good pocket and the sand continued to wash in. It cut out a pair of pump leathers every week.

The advisability of a deep well was questionable. Some predecessor had tried to put down a deep well here and after drilling eighty feet had not gone through the clay. There was no knowing how much deeper the clay might be in this spot.

While we were struggling with this problem, someone told us of a flowing well in the woods a quarter of a mile away. I dared to think of a ram. There may be other rams in Florida besides mine but there cannot be many in a country so flat. When my farm hand speaks of the hill in the backfield, I always give a start. The elevation is something like eighteen inches. We went over to examine the flowing well. It looked like a hog wallow, except that there was not much water in it. Still, the spring was said never to go dry, so we dug a channel and cleared the basin and finally we unsealed a four inch hole in the clay. Through it a stream of fine water came from way down below, somewhere this side of Madagascar.

The question was, would a ram work. It was, of course, a matter of levels. We could get a three foot fall by placing the ram a hundred feet from the spring. To do that we had to put it in a pit and dig a ditch for two or three hundred feet to carry off the waste water. When it came to finding the difference in level between the ram and the house, we had to use our ingenuity. We had no surveyor's level. Instead we used one of these collapsible six foot rules which have a pivot joint every six inches. This was folded in the form of a cross and my fourteen-year-old boy and I proceeded to do some surveying.

First we noted a button on my chest at the height of his eye. Then he went off a couple of hundred feet, held the cross by the short upper end and squinted along the arms, which would of course be more or less level. I held my fingers on the button and slid a yardstick through them until the lower end crossed his line of sight. Then I moved on to him and he read the distance on the yardstick which gave the difference in level between the two stations. In this way we hitched along to the ram, adding or subtracting the readings, as the case might be. It was a crude method and a bit risky to trust to. With such a slight fall at the ram, if we had too much of an error, we might find ourselves with not much water coming into the tank. But we had the courage of our convictions and put in the piping and did all the rest of

the work before we connected the ram. When we tried it, it worked.

We do not do much real farming now. We have tried various things, but, I must admit, without any too great success. This is undoubtedly due to our trying to undertake too much with the resources at our disposal. Now we have settled down to taking what care we can of the tung trees in the time that is left after Lucius has raised enough corn to keep the mule the next year.

And, as an integral part of the farm, I must say a word about Lucius. Although neither he nor anyone else knows, I presume he is nearly sixty years old, but still active in a restricted sense. The best way to give an idea of Lucius' speed is to use a comparison which, while it may be familiar, expresses it exactly. If you look across a broad field and see something which might be one of those tall, black stumps which are common in this country, or might be Lucius, watch it for an hour. If, at the end of that time, it has moved, it is a stump.

Lucius is what I call a non-commissioned preacher. One has to be very careful about saying anything of a religious nature to him. If you make this error, you have your choice of participating in an hour's conversation or of being impolite, and I am never impolite to a farm hand.

Only once in my life have I spoken a harsh word to

a hired man. On that occasion, while I did not run short of picturesque language, I found that to properly express my feelings was exhausting, and the man left next day of his own accord. I find that it is wiser and more economical to repress my true feelings than to suffer the annoyance of hunting up new help. But Lucius is a kindly soul and I believe he is thoroughly honest, which is a great thing and unusual, as long as he can take life in leisurely fashion. His interests are ours. I imagine we shall always have him with us. As a fact, I believe that the only way in which we could get rid of him would be to sneak off in the night and leave him with the place.



## CHAPTER IV

### GETTING ABOUT

I WAS SOON TO LEARN that if you want to feel any freedom at all and not be merely a “checker”, you must be able to get about by yourself. The early stage of finding your way around the house, learning how to feel your way without knocking things over, is soon passed. But there are bound to be some knocks to take. Of course, if you move slowly, take oceans of time and never have anything on your mind but the next step, I suppose one would not have much difficulty. But I like to move about quickly and that brings its troubles.

Speaking of collisions, it seems to me that the knocks one receives when one cannot see at all are much more vicious than those which a sighted person gets when it is pitch dark. I have tried both ways and I believe that a sighted person sees something, at least gets some sort of a shadow in time to slacken his motion a little.

What you are doing, too, makes a good deal of difference. If you are simply taking a walk and can give

your whole attention to it, there is usually no reason why anything disagreeable should happen. It depends, too, whether or not you are carrying anything. I do not mean carrying a thirty or forty pound traveling bag. This makes no great difference. But it is astonishing what a blow you can get if you collide with something solid when you are carrying a hundred pounds. Most people, however, have no occasion to carry such a weight.

Another thing that enters the consciousness by direct contact is the difference in solidity between wood and stone. One would think that there was not much difference between cracking his head against a hard wood post or a rock, but there is. There seems to be a little give, a faint springiness, to even a large post but the rock has the immovability of the earth behind it. Never again do I want to bang my head against the round stone in the corner of the cellar wall by the bulkhead. I have done that several times when I was carrying something heavy.

It may seem surprising that a blind man with much practice and perfectly at home in a place, would get many bumps. He may go over a certain course five hundred, even a thousand times, safely. Then, perhaps, some little thing diverts him and he gets six inches off his course. It isn't so surprising after all.

Usually, what turns one aside is something very slight. Sometimes it is not. A few years ago, when my

boy was at the pet stock age, I had been building a pigeon coop in the peak of the garage. All that remained to be done was to put up a landing board about thirteen feet from the ground. I had no ladder and so was forced to improvise. I placed a table a couple of feet from the building, on that an old washstand and for the third story, a kitchen chair. When I stood upon the chair, I could do very well, although the pigeon holes were still above my head. I was holding the landing stage, a hammer and nails, and feeling with the other hand the lines of the weather boarding to get the stage level, when a man came into the yard selling something. I intimated over my shoulder, or under my arm, that I was not interested, that I was supplied—that I already had shoes. He was undaunted and continued shooting his sales talk upward at about fifty-seven degrees, or the unit angle. Without thinking, I turned to say something which would terminate the interview and, doing so, stepped back into the air. It was quite a jolt for me, but he was not disturbed by the interruption, and after the first surprise, started again with the sales talk. I was finally forced to tell him that I was not in the mood. I was annoyed because I thought I was too old for that sort of thing.

Out of doors, in a place to which you are well accustomed, I suppose the feel of the ground and the sense of distance are the chief aids in getting about. You do not feel your way with the feet. Rather you

are immediately aware when you are on the wrong ground. Confidence has a great deal to do with it, or, to put it the other way, lack of confidence is apt to spoil the performance.

An incident which occurred during the first few weeks after I went into the country shows this, and something more. I was walking to a neighbor's house, a quarter of a mile away one evening and, of course, could not see a thing. There were two bends in the road and a driveway to turn into. I was thinking about my errand and when my thoughts came back to what I was doing, I was half way up the drive. It was something of a shock to find that I had followed that narrow footpath perfectly. It was not skill and it was not the trained action of the muscles. Fingers may learn to make the proper motions on violin strings, but it does not seem to me that feet would learn just how to turn at different points in the landscape. Besides, I had not been in that neighborhood long enough for that. On my return home, on the other hand, my thoughts were on finding my way. Therefore, I zigzagged from one stone wall to the other for the first half of the way. Then I stopped, gathered myself together, and did a little better.

In speaking of distance judging I do not mean counting paces or counting the steps in a flight of stairs. I have never known how many steps led up to any building and I have never paced any distance as an aid



in getting about. You have to know in a general way the distances between near-by objects and the time it takes to go from one to another. Therefore, if you do not arrive at your destination at about the proper time, it is better to begin to be careful.

Sometimes blind people have a wire stretched, perhaps with a wooden ring on it, so they can stroll back and forth for exercise. I have a few wires connecting the buildings in the dooryard, about three hundred feet of wire on a farm that is two miles around. The wires enable me to walk rapidly where I go most often, but I do not use them all the time. Because of the wire the paths beside them are kept well defined. In a dooryard which covers nearly an acre of ground the wires are also useful as landmarks because they are of different kinds.

Out on the farm I carry a cane or stick and go by the lay of the land. Of course I know what field I am in and forty acres is the largest of the fields. If worst comes to worst, I know the fences. Different portions were put up at different times and are not of the same kinds of wire.

Perhaps one comes to a fence when looking for a gate. It may be that there is a different kind of fence on each side of the gate, and so the course to take is known at once. If that help is not available it may be that the slope of the ground or some other feature of the surface will indicate the course to pursue. In time

one comes to have a picture of the surroundings, perhaps not much like the picture that a sighted person has, but still one that serves the purpose. As a general rule one keeps track of one's progress in various directions so that one knows where one is at any moment by dead reckoning.

At times, however, you may be drawn into some activity which seriously challenges your sense of direction. For instance, one Sunday morning, while the rest of the family were properly at church, I had been walking out back on the farm. I had two catch or "ketch" dogs with me. These are dogs which are used to catch range cows and hogs or almost anything else for that matter. They are of no particular breed, although they are apt to run quite strongly to bulldog blood. They have been trained to catch and hold for generations.

As I came along the lane on my way home, I passed a small enclosure, perhaps a quarter of an acre, where we had had a kitchen garden. A half dozen shoats had found their way in there and were grunting around contentedly. It was too much for the dogs. They dived in and I after them. In five seconds they each had hold of a pig. I got one dog off but while I was struggling with the second, the first dog caught another pig. As soon as I had torn the second dog loose, I gave him a couple of good cracks with my cane and started for the first one. We went through

this procedure several times. It was quite a mix-up, hogs, dogs, briars, weeds and myself. There wasn't a soul on the place and I had to settle matters or have the pigs all chewed up. The dogs had just gone crazy.

I had already broken a foot off the end of my cane, when I joined the party again and whacked one dog over the head until he let go of the pig. I tucked this dog under my arm and scrambled to find out what the other one was doing. Catching up with him, I got down on my knees, straddling him. I had to break what was left of the cane over his head before he would let go of his hold. Finally I got him under the other arm, a feat which wasn't too easy. With the two of them still frantically squirming and yelping, I kicked my way to the gate and came to the house.

It was not too difficult getting out of *that* small place. The incident merely serves to show that circumstances may arise under which one may lose one's bearings. When one does get turned around in a large space, sometimes the sun or the wind may help. Oftentimes I have got my direction from hearing a rooster crow or some other sound, which I knew came from near the house.

There is one skill which I do not seem to have acquired in a degree comparable to many other blind people. It is the ability to feel things at a distance. You just simply feel an object, of some size, of course, at a distance of five or ten feet. If you do not feel it then,



you may feel it soon after when you get a little closer. It is like a sort of pressure. Wind interferes with using this so-called sense. It may be that I use it more than I realize, for a strong wind bothers me enormously. Also, if your attention is very actively engaged elsewhere, the warning may not reach you.

Walking along a country road used to be pleasant and comfortable. Years ago there used to be, and I presume there still is, a little footpath along the side of a New England road, close by the grass. Bicycles as well as foot travelers followed this path and the ground was patted hard and smooth. I usually carried a cane, but not for the purpose of feeling the ground. I held it, with as much apparent negligence as possible, so that the end stuck out a foot in front of my shins to give warning of obstacles. All that was necessary was to know the arrangement of the roads, but unfortunately, sometimes something would slip.

One night I went to see some people who lived about five miles away, in the corner of the township. A friend had told me about the roads beyond where I knew them and knew how to locate the place. There was no difficulty in arriving. On my way back, in order not to miss my turn, I took the other side of the road. I had gone perhaps a mile when I had a feeling that things were not right. I went a little further and still had the feeling. I crossed the road and turned back. Sure enough, presently I swung into the



original road. It seems that the young man had forgotten to tell me of the Beaver Dam Road, which, if I had kept on, would have led me four miles through the woods and landed me five miles from home in another direction. I had followed the gradual curve where the roads came together without knowing it.

Once in a while the joke was on the other side. One night I was walking along the New Road, which was so called because it had only been built about fifty years ago. It was something like Henry Horton's colt. Henry had raised a horse once. The animal was twenty-three years old when I lived in the neighborhood, but he was still "the colt." The New Road ran straight and nearly level for a mile and a half with woods on both sides.

In those days I could still see a light. When I was about a third way along the road, I saw the light of a car. Being as yet a novice in the "blind" life, I stepped off the road and into the low bushes to let it pass. It was a good way off and a long time coming. As it came up it went slower and slower. It crowded way over to the other side of the road, almost crawling, and as it came opposite me it shot ahead and was gone. Then the truth dawned upon me. I was standing there with my cane and the people must have thought I was waiting with a gun to hold them up. Very likely one wouldn't expect to find a blind man in such a place at one o'clock in the morning.

Not long after, the tables were turned. It was in the winter and I was coming home from some "doings". There was some snow on the ground and a hard crust. As I came along the road, all open with fields on both sides, I noticed the sound of steps ahead of me, crunch, crunch, breaking the crust. It was a little unusual, because there was no one else in the neighborhood who would be walking the road at that hour. There was nothing to worry about and yet there had been, occasionally, some trouble with a drunken cranberry-bog laborer. I listened intently to the footsteps. We were coming to the country schoolhouse. I heard the steps go off into the schoolyard. No one could possibly have any reason to go into the schoolyard. Evidently he was going to let me get by and then fall in behind me.

There was nothing to do but go on, and so I did. As I came abreast the building I got the meaning of the sounds I had heard. There was a fair breeze blowing and the halyards were slapping the flagpole. It had been very realistic.

Walking in the city would be easy if it weren't for the other people. For this reason it is much pleasanter to ramble after most of the folks have settled down for the night. The mere matter of learning the streets and the nature of the sidewalks is simple. There are, however, many more people in the city to leave things lying about. Where the way was clear yesterday, now

there are obstructions, scooters, bicycles, baby carriages, and there may be a ditch where men are working on the water pipes. There is one advantage, however. Where the buildings are not too far back from the sidewalk, there is a different sound to your footsteps, especially if you use leather heels. You can check your position often in this way, when you have become familiar with the buildings.

Unless the houses are too far apart, a blind man can usually tell when he comes to a cross street by the sound, or just from the effect of openess. Then he can watch out for the down curb. It is best to hold the point of the cane out in front to locate the up curb. No one can look dignified when he meets the curb unexpectedly. One has to take this precaution even with guides. Sometimes they forget to mention that you are close to the curb. When they do mention it they seem to find it hard to speak of it at just the right time. There was a period of about four years once when I never had a pair of shoes a week before someone let me bark the toes. It was discouraging. I realized that, in spite of the inconvenience, a cane is a good thing, even with a guide.

Traffic, of course, is not what it used to be. Before, there was less travel and the cars made more noise. Years ago I used to amuse myself, while I was waiting for my prescription to be filled, by crossing and recrossing a downtown street in Boston. Even with quite



heavy traffic, there would be a lull every few minutes, lasting say, for ten seconds. The game was to recognize the coming of the lull in time to get across. It was good practice. But in a large city nowadays it is all one whirr. It does not seem to be possible to sort out the sounds you hear. Probably the younger generation of blind people manage it all right. I don't know, for I have no occasion to try it.

I have never used the white cane. It must be a fine thing for those who have to get about in the city alone. Personally I dislike any sort of special label even though it might add greatly to one's comfort and convenience. In a good many places it is now a law that when a blind person steps into the street and holds out his white cane, all traffic must stop until he has crossed. It is against the law for any but blind persons to carry white canes.

This law is not yet in force in all of our states. But long before there were any white canes, there was the helping hand. If you stop and locate the curb with your cane, or make any other motion that tells the tale, it is very rarely that some one does not immediately offer assistance. Taken as a whole, the people in the world are pretty human.

Sometimes this prompt aid comes from unexpected quarters. A young blind man, a friend of mine, was standing one evening by the curb of a fairly busy corner. An old lady, also sightless, approached him



and asked, rather nervously, if he would take her across the street.

"Certainly, Madam," replied the young man, and promptly grasped her arm. He marched her through the traffic in off-hand fashion.

When they reached the farther curb she thanked him fervently.

"Oh, that's all right," he said, "I know how it is. I'm blind myself." The dear old lady nearly fainted.

I had an unpleasant experience one afternoon when I should have done better by asking for help. I was about eight blocks from the railway station and there was just time to catch my train for the country by walking very fast. My route led through a wholesale district. It was Saturday afternoon and there was almost no traffic.

I started along and after I had gone about a block, a young woman came out of a building and set out down the street as though she, too, had just time to catch a train. This was my chance. It was perfectly permissible for two people to be hurrying toward a railway station. I kept about thirty feet behind her and followed her footsteps. We went the seven blocks in great style and I was congratulating myself upon my brilliance when, apparently, the lady started in a curve across the wide street to the station. She must have grazed a huge telephone post. I hit it squarely and at full speed. It was a tremendous shock.

I don't see how it is humanly possible for any blind person to get about in subway stations. Perhaps those who have occasion to do it constantly can manage it. The old elevated was not so bad, one stood a fair show. Street cars, when they are at all crowded, are messy and I never did like using them.

Traveling, on the whole, however, is the easiest thing there is. If you have your fare and change for a succession of porters, taxis, and bell boys, you can go anywhere with perfect comfort. For getting about in strange places, or rather, away from home, messenger boys are convenient. You can keep them with you as long as you like without running up an enormous bill. Of course, for single runs, the cabs are the best. The messenger, however, will stay at your elbow, as long as you like, in buildings as well as out. Usually they seem to enjoy that kind of a job. With the aid of these boys I have been to New York, stayed several days, and never spoken to a soul whom I had known there previously.

Even short train journeys are very pleasant. I have never yet seen a train man who was not fine. They always seem glad to do anything they can to make things easy. Even if you travel on the same line only occasionally they remember you and come to ask, when you leave the train, what they can do in the way of starting you on the next lap.

There was a little trip which I used to take once

in a while where I used three trains. The second stage was on a small cross country affair which connected stations on two main lines. One morning I was coming down on the first train and was very anxious to make connections. My little trick, when I wanted to have a word with one of the train men, was not to stick my ticket in the back of the next seat, but to keep it out of sight. In this way the conductor was forced to ask for it and make his presence known. Therefore, when he punched my ticket I asked, "Are we going to connect with that branch train?"

He said, "They are supposed to wait for us if we are on time, but we are late." He did not seem much interested. In fact, he appeared almost abrupt. Doubtless he had something on his mind. Apparently I was in for it and resigned myself to a three or four hours' wait, as trains did not run frequently on that branch line.

After a while someone leaned over my shoulder and a pleasant voice said in my ear, "I've wired for them to hold that train. You wait here and I'll send a brakeman to get you over to it." This was fine, but when we came to the changing point, no brakeman appeared. Instead it was the conductor once more. It was near the end of a two-hundred-mile run for that train and they were eight minutes late. He tucked his arm through mine and leisurely we sauntered past four or five cars and then down the platform of the branch.



That's the kind of men they are. Many times on that line they have held a long train while a brakeman insisted on going with me until we found someone waiting for me, or to the sidewalk, to make sure that I found a conveyance. That was the old Boston and Maine. It may have had its faults in some ways but there was a mighty fine set of chaps working on it in those days.

I had but one experience alone on a Bay steamer. It was Saturday afternoon and the boat was packed. I asked the purser if he would see that I got off all right. But he forgot me completely. I had to follow the crowd and hope for the best.

There is one aid to blind navigation which I have never tried and that is the dog guide. Everyone is familiar with pictures of a blind man holding to the handle of a harness attached to a tugging dog. From time to time, I have heard of cases where a blind man himself had trained a dog for this purpose. One was a commercial traveler. He had a setter dog which he took with him on his trips. In time the dog learned all the places at which the salesman was accustomed to call in each town.

But the dog guide de luxe is furnished by an institution\* in this country which devotes itself to the training of these animals. The animals used, I believe, are

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\*The Seeing Eye, Inc., Morristown, New Jersey.



German police dogs and their education, which begins at a very early age, is directed solely toward making them masters of their calling. They are trained to give different warnings for different kinds of obstacles, down curbs, up curbs, and so on. They are marvels of educated intelligence. When a blind person has arranged to get one of these dogs, he goes to the establishment and remains there for five or six weeks. He is introduced to his new guide and from that moment, the dog never leaves him day or night. Each new owner feeds his own dog, and man and dog are educated jointly. They learn their teamwork. It is a remarkable product that sets out with the blind man when he starts for home.



## CHAPTER V

### READING AND WRITING

AS A BLIND PERSON you must be able to get about in the world, but you must also have some means of communicating with others. Aside from writing letters, it is sometimes necessary to sign something—a check, a will, etc. I usually accomplish this without the aid of any mechanism. There have been, however, a number of contrivances which enable a blind person to write so that a sighted person can read it. The object to be attained, of course, is to keep the lines from running into each other. One device is a frame with wires stretched across it at the distance desired between the lines of writing. One places this gridiron upon the paper and writes between the wires. While the written line itself may be somewhat wavy, two lines cannot cross, and the result is fairly legible.

Another arrangement is a sheet of thin, stiff cardboard or thin aluminum. This has little “gutters” running across it as far apart as the lines should be. The grooves are about an eighth of an inch wide and just

deep enough so that one can feel them with the point of the pencil. The paper is placed upon this corrugated sheet. The small letters are made wholly in the depression, while the extended parts of the b's, y's, p's and t's extend above and below. This requires more care than the grid, but with some pains, the result is often better.

I believe, however, that nowadays, for almost all purposes, except when writing to each other, blind people use an ordinary typewriter which is much more satisfactory for both the writer and the reader.

A blind man can type a letter to a sighted person but he cannot read an answer written in the same way. The realization of that, I think, brings on one of the most disagreeable moments in a blind person's life. He learns that he will never again have any privacy in the way of correspondence. I do not mean anything of a secret or especially private nature. I mean just an ordinary letter from a friend. There is a pleasure in having a letter for yourself and to yourself. It is the same sort of feeling which one has when talking to a friend.

Suppose you are one of a group of half a dozen people, all of whom you know well. After a time they drift off, on their several ways, all except one friend and yourself. After you have seen them comfortably off, what do you do? You settle down to "talk together". There is something which we value



in this "talking together" of two people. It is a contact of selves.

There is something of the same sort in a personal letter and it is one of the things which has gone when you become blind. Under the new circumstances I think that the letter itself is not the same. I doubt if anyone knowing that a third person will do the reading, will write in just the same fashion. And gradually, too, it is borne in upon you that to a certain extent your privacy in general is gone. Not that your whole life is open to everyone, but that almost every little action is open to someone's scrutiny.

In 1909, institutions having to do with the blind everywhere observed the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Louis Braille. To this blind Frenchman we are indebted for a system of writing and printing for the blind which has taken the place of all other systems used since his time. The radical departure of Braille's scheme consisted in substituting for raised Roman letters symbols made with raised points. It is said that those who learned to read raised Roman letters in childhood found a pleasure in reading them which they did not get from the point characters. For most of us, however, the points are much easier to recognize.

The braille characters are composed of one or more of the six points which constitute a "cell". The cell is a little rectangle, about an eighth of an inch wide

and a quarter of an inch high, standing on end. The positions of the six points are the four corners of the cell and the two midpoints of the vertical sides. The first ten letters are made from the upper four points. The second ten are a repetition of the first ten with the addition of the left-hand lower dot, and the alphabet is completed by beginning the series again and adding both lower dots. The letter w does not follow this scheme as it does not occur in the French alphabet. It was added to English braille at a later date.

The first ten characters when preceded by a numeral sign, become the digits. One numeral sign, of course, suffices for a number of several digits. There are still more than enough combinations left to take care of the punctuation.

In this country a Mr. Joel Smith devised an almost entirely different set of characters which was known as American braille, which never, however, gained much popularity. Also, we had in this country another system known as New York Point. This differed from braille in that the cell was laid upon its side, thus limiting the character to two points in height but giving them a possible four points in length. In all these systems there were several combinations of points left over and these were used to represent combinations of letters or contractions. There are contractions for "and," "ing," "ed," "er," "of," "for," and so on, and they result in much saving of space.

This was all very fine but it had its drawbacks. Not everyone could read and write several systems of raised points, and there was at times difficulty in correspondence. Also, the printing or embossing of books in raised print is an expensive process. It seemed a pity, when there were so few books printed, that they should not be all available to any blind person who could read.

As a first step towards unity a committee investigating the various types brought about, in 1917, the adoption of braille Grade One and a Half. In 1907 the British had worked out three grades of braille: Grade One, fully spelled; Grade Two, moderately contracted; Grade Three, highly contracted. The American committee chose only part of Grade Two; hence the designation, Grade One and a Half.

In this way one system of printing for the blind was in use in America but this was still different from what was found in books printed in England. In 1932, however, an agreement was reached between American and British authorities whereby all books for the adult blind would be printed in Standard English braille, which is very similar to the old English Grade Two. This agreement immediately made many more books available to blind readers in both countries.

Besides the braille characters used in ordinary texts, there is also a musical notation, a chemical notation, and a mathematical notation. There is, too, a braille



shorthand which is not very different from braille Grade Three.

A little incident will serve to show how skills acquired by those who use braille music appear to the casual bystander. There are usually in schools for the blind a few pupils who have some slight amount of vision. One day some visitors were being shown through a school for the blind. On their way through classrooms, workrooms, and so on, they had been introduced to braille. As they entered a music room, one of these youngsters who could see objects at a distance of a few inches, was practicing on the piano. His face was glued to the music. "Oh," exclaimed one lady in rapture, "Do see that dear little boy reading the music with his nose."

I have no occasion to use the musical and chemical notations. I have used the mathematical notation some, but it is cumbersome. I find it easier to hold a complicated mathematical expression in my mind than to examine it in braille. The difficulty is that in braille everything has to be strung out in a single line. An expression involving fractions—compound or complex—exponents, radicals, integrals, and so on, which in inkprint would occupy a space of two or three inches, may in braille take three or four lines. It is necessary to look at a mathematical expression as a whole to know what to do with it. As a consequence, one has to pore over this long braille expression until he has



it fixed in his mind. The difficulty with the memory method is that if you slip, you must go back to the beginning or to where you are sure that you remember an equation. A fairly satisfactory method is to put an equation into braille every little while as a landmark.

Besides being more easily felt and allowing of contractions, braille has the additional advantage over the early raised Roman letter type that the blind individual can write it. There are two methods of writing braille, by hand or by braille typewriter. When it is written by hand, a tablet is used on which the paper is fastened. A metal slate, having rows of little cell holes, makes it possible to have straight lines and uniform characters.

The braillewriters are similar to ordinary typewriters. They differ from the inkprint machines in that there are but six keys, one for each point. You use from one to six fingers to make each character, depending on the number of dots required. These machines have the advantage over the slates of immediately tangible writing. With the braille slate, as the letters are punched through from the back of the sheet, the writing cannot be examined, because the lines must be written from right to left and each character must be made backwards. Sighted persons, if they have need to write to someone in braille and use the slate, usually learn the letters backward only.

There is one of the older systems of raised printing

for the blind which has been retained because it has a special appeal. This is the Moon type, named for the man who invented it, Dr. William Moon. It is a system in which the characters may resemble pot hooks, croquet wickets, and angles placed in various positions. Its field of usefulness lies with those people who become blind so late in life that they have difficulty in learning braille. A moderate proportion of books for the blind is printed in Moon type.

It used to be the general idea, I think, that, as long as a blind man stood such a poor chance of having a good time in this life, the effort should be to assure him of a blissful hereafter. At any rate, it is a fact that in times gone by a large portion of the reading matter provided for the blind was in the nature of religious tracts. The fellow in the dark pored over this material, shut away from the pleasures of this world, centering all his hopes and aspirations on the next. There is, I suppose, more or less of these tracts printed for the blind tucked away in odd corners, but it is a thing of the past.

At the close of the World War a great deal of interest in the blind was aroused on account of the many veterans who came home sightless. Since then the increase in the number of books printed has been very great. Also, members of Red Cross volunteer groups have transcribed into braille hundreds of books. Many books on special subjects have been copied by hand

by these good friends. Such books would not otherwise have been available, because the limited number of readers interested in these special subjects would not have warranted the expense of printing the books on ordinary braille presses.

Since 1931 the government is appropriating a considerable sum of money each year for the publication of books in braille and in Moon type. While the number of books in braille is of course rather small compared with the number printed in ink, still the variety is good and one can find something on almost any subject. As all publishers, both of books and magazines, are usually willing to allow reprints to be made in braille, selections can be made from the best material.

Besides the books there are dozens of periodicals for the blind. They are of various kinds. I think, though, that the one which lies nearest to the hearts of all blind people in this country is that founded in 1907 by Mrs. Matilda Ziegler. This was her gift to the blind and it has always been sent free to any blind person who wished it. Each month for almost forty years it has brought a bit of sunshine to thousands whose lives were dim. And the manager, Mr. Walter G. Holmes, who has guided the development of the magazine since its inception, has given his life to the work. Several other magazines are now supplied to the blind without cost and they give much enjoyment.



And now we also have the Talking Book, one of the greatest boons that science has brought to the blind.

Thirty years ago I suggested that reading for the blind might be possible through the medium of sound. We owe the realization of this dream to my old friend Robert Irwin, who is the head of the American Foundation for the Blind. He made surveys which showed that less than twenty-five per cent of the blind men and women of this country could read braille fast enough for real pleasure or profit. Then, what about the remaining seventy-five per cent who couldn't avail themselves of the braille books printed for Government money? The Talking Book seems to be the answer.

The Talking Book consists of especially made records to be used on a phonograph designed for this purpose. The records are double-sided and each side will run for about fifteen minutes. Fifteen of them will reproduce a novel of average length. Part of the annual Federal appropriation for books for the adult blind is used for the Talking Books, and they are all carried in the mails, as the braille reading matter has been, free of postal charges.

Some of the reading machines are combination Talking Books and radios. There is also a "stem winder" machine for those who live where electricity is not available.

About 23,000 reading machines were made on a



WPA project under the supervision of the American Foundation for the Blind. They are the property of the Library of Congress in Washington and are lent to blind men and women who cannot afford to buy their own machines.

We may say that the Talking Books have doubled the speed of reading for the blind and doubled the number of blind readers in this country. They add greatly to the enjoyment of our leisure.



## CHAPTER VI

### MAKING A LIVING

THERE IS ONE THING a blind person cannot do—he cannot see. Judging by the tales which one hears from time to time there is not much else that he cannot do. To begin with, there are, naturally, just as many kinds and grades of persons without sight as there are of those who can see. Therefore, the problem is to find lines of work in which a blind person is as nearly as possible on an equal footing with the sighted and thus can get a respectable return for his efforts.

The whole story is tied up in that one word “efforts”. As remarked before, a blind man can do nearly everything—given time enough. The question is, what can he do to advantage? In general, the blind man has to expend far greater effort and time than the seeing person to accomplish a given end. We must therefore find out what he can do so well that he gets a return in keeping with his expenditure of effort and time. Then, the problem is one of finding an opportunity for him after the field of work is discovered.

There is one field which offers an opening to blind people of all degrees of ability—salesmanship. We have blind salesmen in all stations from the man who sells papers on the curb to the man who has a large store with a big stock of pianos, other musical instruments, music, phonographs and radios.

Everyone is familiar with the blind canvasser. He sells everything from five-and-ten-cent goods to quite expensive articles. I tried it once. It was when we first lived in the country. A man came along selling an encyclopedia squeezed into one volume. We happened to have the book so he could not sell one to us, but he did better for himself. He suggested that I go out and sell it, which meant that he received a small commission on all I sold. It was in the winter time and there would be a horse available for some weeks, so I did it with my wife to drive. We had a lot of fun, some interesting experiences, and, as I remember it, no disagreeable ones. I should not, however, care to do house-to-house work in the city. As it was, we made a little money.

Then we have the small shop or stand. Among these, stands for the sale of papers, periodicals and tobacco seem to be the most common. The Federal Government has recognized that the operation of small businesses is a suitable field for the blind, and by the passage of the Randolph-Sheppard Act has permitted the operating of vending stand concessions in Federal



buildings by blind operators. Federal buildings have hitherto been closed to this type of enterprise and it therefore amounts to a monopoly for the blind. Considering all that they have to put up with, it seems only fair that the blind should have a little advantage in the way of good locations and restricted competition.

I once had a specialty shop for a few years and one little happening there always brings back a smile. I was alone one day when two quite old ladies came in. They talked for a few minutes and then I turned away to do something. One of the ladies asked a question which I answered. Presently she asked the same question and I answered it again. When I turned back to them, she repeated the question for the third time. Probably I looked surprised for she said, "You see, we are both stone deaf." "And I," I replied, "am stone blind."

It seems that we were all on the rocks each in his own way. They had not been able to tell that I was blind and I did not know that they were reading my lips. We had a merry time for a minute.

Possibly the line which offers the best financial returns for those among the blind who are qualified for it is insurance underwriting. Not everyone has the personality and the approach to make a good insurance salesman. Quite a number of blind persons have succeeded at this occupation, however, and one or two are

in the top class of achievement. Where one has to travel about, the handicap for the blind man is not in the selling itself. When he gets to his prospect he is on nearly equal footing with the other fellow. The trouble comes with the expense of getting about. If he has to hire a guide there is the cost of wages, double meals, and car fares. Oftentimes the expense will swamp him before he gets fairly started. The choice of a guide is not so simple. Not only must he not be a freak or a derelict; he must not be anything which will make the combination appear any more unusual than can be helped. The entrance of the blind man is a little out of the ordinary. If the effect of the *pair* is at all bizarre, all the amazement and curiosity which it produces will have to be dispelled before the prospect is in a frame of mind to believe that his caller can have a serious business proposition.

Politics seems to offer a good field for some sightless people. Apparently blindness seems not to have affected their vocal organs and they seem to hold their own very well.

As among the seeing, only a small proportion of the blind are fitted to follow a profession. There is a fair sprinkling of lawyers. In the medical line you have blind osteopaths and chiropractors. There is also the record of a blind heart specialist who in spite of blindness from the age of eleven years, studied medicine, had a good practice in Chicago, and wrote a

popular textbook on heart diseases.\* There are also blind masseurs. That would seem to be as it should.

Teaching should offer some opportunities to the blind. The difficulty here, however, is not the teaching, but getting the chance to try. There are a few outstanding examples. Nicholas Saunderson, who was the friend of Sir Isaac Newton, succeeded to the latter's position in the Chair of Physics at Cambridge University. In this country there are several blind men engaged in college teaching. In some cases these men retained their positions after their sight failed, others were blind from childhood or early youth.

Blind teachers in secondary schools are not so common, probably because there is apt to be more trouble with discipline. There are a number of blind teachers in schools for the blind, although in some of these schools the policy is rather against blind teachers for blind pupils.

Before I lost my sight I had expected to teach, but I was diverted from this. I have done some tutoring, however, and I believe that there are quite a number of blind tutors. A sightless person probably has more difficulty in getting work as a tutor than one with good eyes but it can be done. It is a fairly comfortable job for a blind person. Most of the classroom difficulties disappear.

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\**Your Heart and How to Take Care of It*, by Robert H. Babcock. New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1924.



Mathematics, my own subject, has its special difficulties for a blind tutor. The student expects in return for his fee to have information supplied as fast as he can absorb it. You must be able to work faster in your head than he can on paper. To show that it is possible for one to gain some facility in this respect, I had occasion awhile ago to freshen up on some mathematics. In twenty-eight hours I had six hundred pages of trigonometry, analytic geometry, and calculus read to me and did most of the problems in my head. Yet, if I were to try, I should find it very hard to get a position as a teacher.

Sir William Herschell, the English astronomer, was blind during the latter part of his life. During those years his daughter did the actual observing for him. The well-known American astronomer, Edwin Brant Frost, was blind for about the last ten years of his directorship of Yerkes Observatory in Chicago. Gifted with a good memory and an adequate imagination, he found no difficulty in carrying on with the aid of competent assistants.

When I speak of blind men as managing businesses, I do not mean those men who have a prosperous business and lose their sight. Their position and problems are not at all the sort of thing which most blind people have to face. Some time ago I was talking to a man who was the head of a very large manufacturing business. He spoke with considerable feeling of the fact



that he was losing his sight. I told him that his position was not so bad as it might be. He had plenty of money, anyway, his business was established, and there was as much chance of its continuing to prosper as one could ever have. He was in a position to hire all the skilled, sighted assistance he pleased. In short, he could run his business just as well as a blind man as he ever did as a seeing person. While, of course, blindness was not to be desired, instead of facing the heart-breaking battle which many blind people face, his calamity was reduced to some personal inconveniences and the loss of the pleasure of seeing the pretty trees and flowers and brooks. I think I hurt his feelings. I think he needed it.

There are a few writers among the blind. They are found in every branch, book, magazine and newspaper work. The newspaper men range all the way from reporters to editors. Some of the correspondents, especially, have interesting jobs. Often they represent three or four papers and work through several towns. In a number of cases on record the management of the paper did not know that their employees could not see.

Music, in one way or another, furnishes employment to many blind people. It is one of those fields in which, at least in some of its phases, the handicap of blindness is reduced to a low level. As among sighted persons, it offers to the blind one of the pleasantest

occupations. Those who teach music, and there are blind teachers of all kinds of musical instruments, have of course their problems, but these can be solved just as blind teachers in other fields find ways of accomplishing their ends. Some blind teachers use braille music; some memorize from having their music read to them; most, I imagine, use both methods. Many of those whose work is playing in public or in orchestras, get their music almost wholly from the radio and from phonograph records. Besides the performers of popular music, there are many whose attainments are of a more spiritual order, among them quite a number of talented church organists and composers.

In addition to those who make their living by producing music, there is a large group who carry on the business of tuning and repairing pianos. Some of these men are very skillful indeed and do fine work in repairing automatic pianos and organs. In the less thickly settled districts some of the tuners work up a following through several towns and make their circuit once or twice a year. On the whole, music affords one of the best fields for those sightless ones who have the necessary ability and training.

There are many operations connected with manufacturing which blind people can perform satisfactorily and with safety. One illustration will show what I mean. Take, for example, the assembling of a spark plug. The blind person, having all the parts before

him, puts the plug together, perhaps winds a circular around it, places it in a box and packs a dozen boxes in a carton. There is nothing difficult about it and the worker without sight can do the job just as fast as the average person. Usually, however, in ordinary times, only a few employers are willing to try a blind worker; in too many cases they are not.

You can scarcely think of any kind of a shop of which there is not a specimen somewhere operated by a blind person. There are shoe repair shops, groceries, craft shops, garages. A number of blind garage owners are expert at repairing cars.

There are blind florists. Roger Babson told me once of a blind man whom he knew who was a butcher. He said the man smelled the meat to see whether it was beef or lamb. I presume that smelling the meat was a wise precaution, anyway.

I suppose the better known occupations for the blind are the old stand-bys of workshops for the blind, broom-making, chair-caning, mattress-making. Many people, after having learned these trades, carry them on independently and have comfortable businesses of their own. New lines are constantly being tried out in the hope of finding other work suited to the sightless. Some very beautiful rugs and draperies have been woven by the blind.

In this connection I recall an incident which happened years ago in one of the state shops. The manager



followed the wise policy of hiring an expert designer. The workers learned by heart the operations necessary to weave the patterns and the results were found to be good. Those in charge desired to reward one man who had done unusually good work by allowing him to choose the design for a rug. After considering the matter the weaver announced that for the main feature he would like a watermelon. The point I want to make is, that while those who are blind from early life doubtless acquire a degree of skill which the rest of us may never equal, yet they get no description of the world around them which tells them what it really looks like. Judging by the taste, the weaver concluded that the watermelon must be a thing of beauty. From one point of view a watermelon is a thing of beauty, but as the large and central feature of a somewhat expensive rug it is something quite different.

To some people, the occupation of the blind which is most frequently brought to their attention is that of those who get their living on the sidewalk. You might say that those who sell a useful article, worth the price they ask for it, are engaged in a clean, honest business. There have been many discussions about those who beg or, if they are not literally begging, offer only some wheezy music in return for the coins they receive. Sometimes it is extremely difficult for a blind person to secure employment. Very many of the blind have not the small capital necessary to start



even the humblest business of their own. I think, perhaps, that many people under these circumstances—blind, penniless, every door closed, and so far as they can see, unfit for any work—I think that many people would choose the little old accordion in preference to starving.

And then, too, all the discredit cannot be laid at the door of the blind. As a case in point, a policeman was walking down the street in one of our larger cities one day when he came to a man who was extracting sad sounds from a fiddle. The man wore black glasses and he had a tin cup beside him. The cop must have been a Boy Scout once, for he was observant. After watching the performer a few moments, he glared at him and growled—

“Looka here, you’re not blind.”

“I know it, Officer,” replied the culprit meekly. “I’m just doing this to hold the stand for a friend of mine.”

“And where is he?” demanded the officer sternly.

“He’s at the movies.”

Right here I want to make a confession. I always thought I would like to take a “toodling horn” and ramble from town to town during the warm part of the year. I still feel that way, but not quite enough to try it. In some cases I even believe it is a very profitable occupation. A prominent eye specialist was visiting in a large southern city. He came upon a blind musician in the heart of the shopping district,

and, impelled by professional interest, looked at his eyes.

"Man," he said, "I can cure your eyes."

"What do I want eyesight for," returned the artist. "I'm making six thousand dollars a year just as I am."

There are scores of instances in which blind people are engaged in unusual occupations. One or two cases will serve to show the variety of their callings. One line that is followed by quite a number of blind people is that of switchboard operating—an occupation made possible by the substitution of sound signals for light signals on switchboards.

Sometimes another handicap is added to that of blindness. There was a man some years ago who was blind and bed-ridden. Among other activities, he was one of the tax assessors in his city. While engaged in this duty he was wheeled about in a litter. Another man, besides being blind, was paralyzed in both legs and arms. To him it seemed a trifle. He had many music pupils and each winter drilled a large chorus.

Way up in the Northwest there was a blind man who knew how to make boots and saddles. He made the best boots and saddles to be had. He had a number of men working for him and when one of them got into difficulties with the work the sightless boss showed him how to straighten it out. It is said that a cowboy would ride fifty to a hundred miles to buy a pair of boots made by this man.

And somewhere, down in a small town in the South, is a young blind Negro. In some way, perhaps through some employment when he could see, he became interested in telephones and learned something about them. When he was faced with the problem of earning a living under the new conditions, he conceived the nervy idea of starting a telephone business. He managed to secure the use of some instrument of a model which had been superseded. He rigged up his own exchange station with discarded bits of apparatus. He set his poles and strung the wires himself. Then he induced a few people to become subscribers to his telephone exchange. His sister was the "central". He was the business head and "trouble-shooter". Little by little the number of his subscribers grew and finally he was able to make arrangements whereby parties on his line could be connected with subscribers to the regular telephone company. It seems as though most of us could learn something of courage and determination from a man like that.

Truly there seems to be almost no limit to the variety of things which blind people can do and are doing. The problem is always the same—to reduce the elements of time and effort as nearly as possible to the level of the ordinary person. Then, all that is needed is all the determination and persistence in the world applied to overcoming one obstacle after another.





## CHAPTER VII

### HOBBIES AND RECREATIONS

BLIND PEOPLE have just as much need of diversion as sighted persons. Perhaps, for us, it is more essential to have some form of entertainment at hand, as we are surely more restricted in the matter of getting about.

While it is true that, if one has sufficient resources within, one is not dependent to any great extent upon ordinary "amusements", the proportion of people who are so endowed is no greater among the blind than among the sighted. And in any event, most of us like a little of plain amusement rather frequently.

Many "parlor" and "table" games are directly available to the blind. Several have been arranged so that sightless persons can manage them comfortably. For instance, there are special checker and chess boards for the blind. As with the sighted, card playing is probably the most popular indoor game. The cards are very easily prepared for the use of a blind person. Each card is brailled in the upper left hand corner with a letter and a number, showing the suit and value.

The only card game which I care much about is cribbage. I play even that so rarely that I have never gone to the trouble of having a pack of cards prepared. Instead, I let my opponent, when the cards are dealt, tell me what cards I hold. Even under these circumstances, I have usually managed to win half the time.

I think it is frequently the case that a great part of a blind person's spare time has to be spent alone. Of course there are solitaire and similar devices for amusement, but undoubtedly the three standbys are reading, music and the radio. Fortunately for the blind, there are, nowadays, more interesting and instructive books at one's disposal in braille and in Talking Book form than one can use.

Of all the new things which have come into the lives of the blind, the radio is one of the most important. It needs no comment other than to remark that it probably means far more to the blind than to the seeing. The only respect in which a blind person is at a disadvantage in using a radio is that he cannot read the printed log and the dial. He can, however, braille his own log and calibrate the knob of the station finder to suit his own needs. Even without going to this trouble, there is plenty of enjoyment at hand.

However, one cannot take all one's recreation sitting in a corner or even before a checker board. One must have some exercise. There seems to be quite a tendency for a blind person not to move about. Perhaps it would

be better to say that it takes more effort to get into motion.

I imagine that statement might be questioned by people with different points of view. Someone who has been blind all his life may suggest that I, myself, have acquired no facility in getting about as a blind man. On the contrary, it appears to me that *he* does not know what it is to move really freely. Another person, who can see, may say that naturally there is less inclination to take exercise under my present condition. I must admit there is some truth in that when I compare the urge I feel now to take a moderate little walk with the eagerness I used to feel for going out and tramping a dozen miles.

When I could see, I used to be very active, and there surely is a difference. I now feel that long walks would be grand, but there are difficulties in taking them. I doubt if any blind person can know the country well enough and be sure that there will be no obstacles, so that he can walk eight or a dozen miles at any reasonable and enjoyable speed. And if it is a case of walking with someone, the chances of finding a companion nowadays who enjoys that sort of thing are few. Even if you find him, the probability that your leisure and his will often come at the same time is small. Even at best the walking will not be like the old walk, where you swung off with a free stride, using most of the muscles of your body. To make sure

that I have made myself clear, I mean that if you walk sixteen miles and do the last four in forty-four minutes, you are getting some exercise.

Because the opportunity is denied, one gradually loses the inclination and the strength for strenuous physical exercise. A few years ago I could jump up in the air, turn over and light on my feet. As I am not a circus performer, I used to do it on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico, where there was a foot of water to provide a cushion in case of a possible slip. I should not care to try it now, for I am not sure that I could do it. There is no doubt but that many or most of our motions are restricted through a life in blindness, and thirty years of restricted motions have their effects.

Swimming seems to me to be one of the finest forms of exercise that a blind person can have. It has the advantage of using nearly all the muscles of the body and the blind person is practically on even terms with the other fellow. On a crowded beach, however, if one is in the habit of striking off alone, as I do, there is a possibility of getting into unexpected and even embarrassing situations. But, as everyone is good-natured when in the water, it usually turns out all right.

In spite of all precautions, one sometimes runs across something new. I had a little experience of this kind one day on a Gulf beach which made me a bit more careful afterwards. No one goes out very far there,



partly because there is a strong current along the Keys and partly, if people are like me, because it gets deep pretty quickly and there may be some danger of sharks.

At any rate, I went away out beyond the rest of the bathers. Presently I heard my wife call, but the short choppy waves made a continuous roar. This confused me. I started, as I thought, for shore. Three times we repeated this performance and each time, as I learned afterwards, I headed for Honduras. Of course, I realized that I was not coming in. I would not have believed it possible that I could not tell from what direction the sound came. That steady roar produced an effect which I had not met before. The old rule of "follow the swells to shore" did not work. Then I had an idea. I raised myself out of the water and called, "Yell twice." That did the trick. When the second shout came, I was ready for it and there was no more difficulty.

Diving, too, is just as much fun when you cannot see as when you can. Of course one has to be careful to make sure that no one is in the way. The interesting thing is that it seems to take much longer to get to the water when you cannot see. I once dove from the upper deck of a small steamer. I knew how high above the water I was, and yet it seemed as though I would never get there. This made such an impression on me that I forgot to turn to come up, and I

went about as far under water as I had been above it.

There are a number of activities in which a blind person can participate very well with a sighted companion. Rowing and canoeing offer nearly as much pleasure as when one can see. I have heard of a few instances in which blind men pursued these sports alone, but it must necessarily be under somewhat special circumstances.

One man lives where the two ends of a loop of a river are fairly near together. He trundles his boat to the upstream end of the loop and goes with the current down to the near point below, which he has found some means of locating.

There would be no danger at all in boating on a small lake. The worst that could happen would be to have to follow the shore back to the starting point. I often amused myself in this way, when there was a thick fog, in the days when I could see.

I have never tried skating, but I do not see why it would not be perfectly feasible. At least it would have the advantage over walking that one would be spared the annoyance of striking unexpected hubbles. To a seeing person, this may seem a trivial thing, and so it is. There are usually no hard wrenches, but the effect is quite constant. The blind man never knows, except when walking on a sidewalk, just how his foot will strike the ground. It may never have occurred to you that you watch the ground to see what the footing is

going to be, but you do. An occasional glance is all that is necessary.

Dancing seems to be quite universally enjoyed by the blind. If one can dance fairly well and has a good partner, there is practically no difficulty, in either a large or small crowd. Even when one's skills are quite the opposite of good, the result is not much worse than when the participants can see. Riding a horse, especially on back roads in the country, is a fine recreation and exercise, always provided that the animal is not too much of a horse.

In the old days when bicycles were more or less universal, this form of riding was open to a good many. Of course the simple thing for the blind was the tandem; still, there were those who rode single wheels. One adventurous spirit used to follow a guide, who rode another machine and rang a bell at intervals and at each turn of the course. It does not seem to me that this would work out so well nowadays, even in side streets where the traffic is light. One can never be sure exactly what an automobile is going to do. Some years ago, at a school for the blind in England,\* they had a machine built which would allow a number of pupils to ride at one time. The contrivance was not exactly a bicycle, as it had two rear wheels, to help

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\*Royal Normal College and Academy of Music for the Blind, London.



steady it. A sighted instructor rode on the front seat to steer and altogether the crew numbered a dozen or more. The machine was geared to develop a fair speed and the pupils were able to take long rides.

I have heard about one blind man who was in the habit of driving a horse alone over a certain route every day or two. That would be all right as far as the man, the horse, and the road were concerned, but, again, there is the motorist to consider.

They say there has even been one blind man who chose to drive a car with a small black boy to sit beside him and tell him how to steer. This appears to me to be mere bravado. One may have a right to take any risk he pleases for himself, but I do not think a blind person has any more right to try to drive a car than a drunken man.

People sometimes wonder why a blind person shouldn't get just as much enjoyment from sitting on a merry-go-round for an hour or two as from riding in a car. And again, if a car is preferable, why shouldn't riding round and round the block be just as satisfactory as going to some particular place. Well, there is a difference, and, I believe, even more of a difference than there is for sighted people. The one with sight may see something diverting when going around the block but for the blind man it is dull. The same thing applies to walking. It may be a joy to walk back and forth along a short path, but the zest is soon gone.



One thing has proved to be somewhat amusing in the light of recent developments. I think it used to be the general impression that while blind people liked to go to the theater, it was rather a sad makeshift as a means of pleasure. Now, thousands of seeing people listen with delight to radio plays each evening, under exactly the same conditions as the blind. The blind even have an advantage over the seeing in that they can listen to plays recorded for the Talking Book by the American Foundation for the Blind. Because of copyright regulations, these recorded plays, often with a cast of famous Broadway players, are available only to blind people.

As a matter of fact, I think that going to the theater and being where the action is actually going on adds considerably to the pleasure. The radio or the Talking Book, however, is always at hand and that far more than makes up for the occasional little thrill of going out to the place of amusement.

There is the same enjoyment for the blind in attending games and races as there is in going to a play in the theater. Here again, in spite of the fact that one can be far more comfortable "listening in" at home, there is a mild kick in attending the gathering. The matter of going to the scene of the excitement, contact with the spectators, little incidents which happen on the side, in short, getting the spirit of the thing, adds a great deal.

On the other hand, with the best intentions in the world, the average friend going with you to the game falls short of the professional radio announcer when describing the game. Too often, at the best moments, the novice becomes so absorbed that he forgets to keep the description going and at the very moment when you expect the greatest pleasure, the old fact of partial isolation is driven home to you. One may as well say it; any person who is outside of the normal and who requires more than the ordinary attention usually given to a companion, is to some extent a bother. And that person is *you*. Still, that is part of the general effect of being blind. It does not concern the matter of amusement any more than any other phase of a blind man's life.

In spite of everything, some blind men become real baseball fans. I know of one blind man who claims that he rarely misses a ball game which takes place within twenty miles of his home.

I believe that nowadays in the schools for the blind they do quite a bit with athletics. By having some pupils who have partial vision on the teams, they manage to get some real enjoyment from baseball and football, although only rarely do they arrange games between the schools. They do, however, have track meets. In most of the events no especial arrangement is required. In the races each contestant has his own running lane marked out by cords.

And then, there are the plain diversions, activities different from the regular work, something in the way of occupation to fall back upon when nothing else offers. Sitting still and doing nothing may or may not be more unbearable for a person without sight than it is for one who can see. I do not know. I do not mean making an effort to be always busy—far from it. Loafing is pleasant enough to anyone who is not warped, and it may be that when properly pursued, loafing is a profitable occupation. Enforced idleness, however, is hard to endure.

There is the greatest variety to these odd-time employments. I shall only mention one or two. Of course it often happens that what is one man's regular work is another's hobby. Some attend to the wants of a few hens. Others raise plants and shrubs. Women knit and tat and do various kinds of fancywork. There is a little zest to some of these stunts because they call for considerable skill.

Learning manual skills is more of an effort for the blind, and much patience is called for. I knew a young blind man who took his typewriter to pieces and put it together again for practice in manipulation. I believe, too, that when he had more time than he knew what to do with he took his watch apart and reassembled it. I think that along this line I have had the most fun out of simple carpentry.

My idea was not to try to do something com-



plicated, which required great skill, but to make something useful and presentable as easily and expeditiously as possible. And for me the fact of having made something worth while constituted a great part of the pleasure.

It is, of course, possible to make things out of odd bits of lumber such as packing boards which come in all shapes and sizes, but it means much more work to get the material into shape than to make the article. By using good lumber dressed on both sides, edges square and planed, and by planning the article according to the sizes of material available, it is possible to build simple things without having the task go so slowly as to be tedious.

Following this procedure I have made a bookcase in one night and the result, I believe, was as good as that obtained by the average carpenter. The one aid, which for me counts more than anything else, and which I made right at the start, is a large miter box wide enough to receive a twelve-inch board. By making all cuts in this miter box, the edges of the pieces used are always square and plumb and the work goes together properly.

With lattice strips it is easy to produce very good paneling effects. Planning the job so as to attain the desired end with the materials at hand is fully as interesting as doing the actual work. Simple, useful articles which look well are acceptable additions to



the household outfit, and there is a good bit of satisfaction in making them.

There are many other lines in which one can find agreeable diversions. I have spoken at some length of the woodworking just to give some idea of the general method of working out schemes of keeping oneself occupied to fit the circumstances. While there are not as many opportunities for enjoyment open to a blind person as there are to one who can see, still there are plenty. After all, we have to do something to get our happiness, but that does not mean that we deliberately set out in search of it. If, by being pleasantly busy, we find contentment, we are quite apt to realize presently that happiness has come too.



## CHAPTER VIII

### SUMMING UP

MY PURPOSE in writing this little book was to give people some notion of how a blind man manages the multitude of little problems which seem to crowd you after the lights have gone out for you. I have tried to show that your independence is still there, that you can work and accomplish things, but that, nevertheless, you must learn a new and often queer sort of life.

You have to develop new kinds of skills. Sometimes, the things that seem most difficult to you are the ones you did not expect would give you any trouble. You have to learn to be patient and persistent, for everything you do will need the expenditure of far more energy and effort than the ordinary person finds necessary.

Naturally, we sometimes wonder what it all means, a life in blindness or complicated by any other severe physical handicap. While we can smile at life, nevertheless, we know we have something to bear in addition to the burdens most people carry.

If we were put here for a purpose, that purpose must be that we should grow and develop. Whatever the nature of our ultimate goal may be, it must be in keeping with the grandeur of the universe. Obviously, we have much to learn and much to become. It is a pleasing fancy to suppose that blindness is a sort of advanced course.

Happiness comes to the blind as it comes to the seeing. But perhaps we are more able to realize that one can be happy with what one has and govern ourselves accordingly. Certainly, many things are denied us, and, if we are to be happy, we must accept cheerfully the portion allowed us.

On the average we may make less money. We may have fewer comforts, and luxuries, and pleasures than our friends who can see, but when it comes to the real issue we are on an equal footing.

The fundamental idea nowadays is that blind people should mingle as much as possible with the seeing, lead as normal a life as they can, instead of being segregated in groups. That sounds reasonable enough, but it was a long time in coming. Many years ago, I understand, the blind were considered so different from ordinary folk that blind paupers were placed in insane asylums instead of in the ordinary poorhouse. It is hard to imagine anything much worse than to be obliged to pass all one's time in the society of lunatics. Probably, most of those blind people were



not long in becoming eligible to their environment. Fortunately, those days are gone, and I hope, forever.

As it turned out, my life as a blind man was spent mostly in the country. This may have been unwise. Being a teacher at the time my sight went, perhaps I should have gone on with my teaching. Other blind men have done so successfully, and, I believe, the theory of continuing to do what you have done before is more in line with up-to-date social thinking. Perhaps, with me, fate decided the issue by having me born thirty years too soon for that competent advice. Anyway, it was the country life for me.

I no longer, however, do much on the farm myself. My days of rough-and-tumble are over. Yet I have to do something. I am afraid not to. One always hears these tales of people going to pieces when they stop work, or stop being active in other ways. I still milk the family cows, for instance. Milking is not so confining as it might be, because we do it only in the morning. The calves run with the cows during the day and this leaves me free at night, as Lucius is kind enough to bring the animals up and care for them. And then I have a little line of odds and ends of work which occupies me for six or eight hours. This, I believe, would save my declining years, if I were to decline. But I decline to do so.

I don't know that life in the country is the pleasantest thing for a blind man. I suppose that there is

just as large a proportion of blind people as there is of seeing persons who cannot be really contented except in the city. But while there are, of course, many features about the city which are preferable, on the whole, the country suits me very well.

I have a good large space where I can come and go and do what I like, free from curious scrutiny. And when, as happens every few weeks, in an exuberance of joy I choose to sing at the top of my voice, there are no neighbors near enough to be annoyed. Distance in kindly fashion has mellowed the sound by the time it reaches the ear of my neighbor and he merely remarks, "That old blind man is sho' happy tonight."







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